



# Washington State Fusion Center INFOCUS

WEDNESDAY — 20 JAN 2021



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## Event Calendar

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## Events, Opportunities

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HEADLINE	01/20 World reacts to Biden inauguration
SOURCE	<a href="https://abcnews.go.com/International/european-leaders-uk-russia-react-president-elect-joe/story?id=75365270">https://abcnews.go.com/International/european-leaders-uk-russia-react-president-elect-joe/story?id=75365270</a>
GIST	<p>LONDON -- World leaders are beginning to react to a “new dawn” in U.S. politics ahead of Joe Biden’s inauguration as the 46th President of the United States at the Capitol in Washington, D.C. today.</p> <p>Historic allies in the EU and the U.K. have struck the most upbeat tone, with Ursula von der Leyen, the President of the EU Commission, saying that they have a “friend in the White House” after four years where <a href="#">transatlantic relations have come under strain</a>.</p> <p>“This is a historical achievement and this also makes this day very special,” she said. “This new dawn in America is the moment we’ve been waiting for so long. Europe is ready for a new start with our oldest and most trusted partner.”</p> <p>"This will be a very strong starting point for our renewed cooperation and of course, way more is to come," she added.</p> <p>The British Ambassador to the U.S., Dame Karen Pierce, said that the incoming Biden presidency was “very good news” for the U.K.</p> <p>Charles Michel, the President of the European Council, said that the incoming presidency was an "opportunity to rejuvenate the Transatlantic relationship."</p> <p>“President-elect Biden already had a very good conversation with the prime minister where they covered a lot of things,” she said. “But one of the things they are both really focused on is COVID recovery. And how to make sure that recovery leads us to build back better in a greener way, a more sustainable way, but also a way that promotes open societies, promotes democratic values, helps us level up and is consistent with open markets.”</p> <p>At the end of a Trump presidency when relations with <a href="#">Russia</a> have often dominated the headlines, President Vladimir Putin is yet to react but the Kremlin spokesperson Dmitry Peskov phoned into a press briefing to say that he did not foresee a change in the U.S.-Russia relationship.</p> <p>"Nothing will change for Russia. Russia will continue to live just the way it has lived for hundreds of years, seeking good relations with the U.S.," he said. "Whether Washington has reciprocal political will for that will depend on Mr. Biden and his team."</p> <p>On a different note, incoming Vice President Kamala Harris’ ancestral village in India, where her mother’s family hail from, marked the day of the inauguration with special prayers and pictures of Harris displayed in public and celebrations.</p> <p>Thulasendrapuram, a tiny village just over 200 miles from the city of Chennai, is where Harris’ maternal grandfather was born.</p> <p>“We are feeling very proud that an Indian is being elected as the vice president of America,” Anukampa Madhavasimhan, a local teacher, told the <a href="#">Associated Press</a>.</p>
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HEADLINE	01/19 Gov. to assess Guard presence in Olympia
SOURCE	<a href="https://www.king5.com/article/news/local/inslee-national-guard-inauguration-olympia-wilcox/281-8f45622e-b60b-4b68-9569-96334a61c9c5">https://www.king5.com/article/news/local/inslee-national-guard-inauguration-olympia-wilcox/281-8f45622e-b60b-4b68-9569-96334a61c9c5</a>

GIST	<p>OLYMPIA, Wash. — Gov. Jay Inslee will assess the need for continued extra security on the state Capitol grounds after Wednesday’s presidential inauguration in Washington, D.C.</p> <p>Earlier this month, Inslee activated up to 750 members of the Washington National Guard to assist with Capitol campus security following breaches in Olympia and Washington, D.C.</p> <p>In D.C. on Jan. 6, a violent demonstration where five people died, including one police officer, disrupted a joint session of Congress to certify the election of President-elect Joe Biden.</p> <p>That same day, demonstrators in Olympia broke through the gate at the governor's residence located on the Capitol campus. They left after less than an hour, only damaging the gate. No one was injured.</p> <p>Officials in all 50 states received federal warnings of possible armed demonstrations at state capitols. The National Guard's activation in Washington state also overlapped with the start of the state's 2021 Legislative Session.</p> <p>The Washington National Guard's activation at the state Capitol is set to expire Sunday, Jan. 24, but a spokesperson said the governor will determine if they’re needed that long, or longer, after speaking with guard and state patrol officials.</p> <p>A relatively small number of people have been arrested since the start of the legislative session. And most public meetings during the legislative session will be conducted remotely because of the coronavirus pandemic.</p> <p>What has the beefed-up security cost taxpayers?</p> <p>Washington State Patrol spokesperson Chris Loftis said the exact figure is not known yet.</p> <p>“It’s a lot. It’s going to be more than people are comfortable with,” Loftis said.</p> <p>Inslee said he felt the presence of the guard was the “right response.”</p> <p>Loftis said it has been worthwhile.</p> <p>"Preparedness isn't cheap, safety isn't cheap," Loftis said. "But neither are the lives that we protect in this effort."</p> <p>House Minority Leader Rep. J.T. Wilcox said he hopes the federal government will be able to pay for some of the increased security measures.</p> <p>"I don't regret that the state patrol and people involved in security reacted strongly to some very worrisome threats," said Wilcox, R-Yelm. "But we don't want that to last forever."</p>
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HEADLINE	<b>01/19 Rocky rollout: websites crash, lack doses</b>
SOURCE	<a href="https://www.kiro7.com/news/local/rocky-rollout-massive-vaccine-demand-uncertain-supply-website-troubles/ZSZTBXM5Y5A23NHM6UJNHXP3U/">https://www.kiro7.com/news/local/rocky-rollout-massive-vaccine-demand-uncertain-supply-website-troubles/ZSZTBXM5Y5A23NHM6UJNHXP3U/</a>
GIST	<p>Almost as soon as Washington state rolled out its <a href="#">PhaseFinder</a> website, it crashed. The next morning, the Department of Health website that has a <a href="#">vaccine location list</a> — a partial one at least — also crashed.</p> <p>The state is now vaccinating people in phase 1A or phase 1B/tier 1, but many people who were able to access the sites said they’re finding all slots are booked for months.</p> <p>But some seniors are finding success.</p>

“I have it scheduled tomorrow morning at 8:06 a.m.,” said Victor Sansalone, who is getting his shot through [Swedish Health and Seattle University](#). “I’m excited about it because I’m 87 years old,” he said.

He said though family members live in the area, he and his wife had only seen them through Zoom for much of the past year.

“It is definitely relief,” said Joseph Garcia, who has an appointment next week. “It shows there is light at the end of the tunnel,” he said.

People who are eligible include:

- Workers in health care settings (1a).
- High-risk first responders (1a).
- 65 years and older (1b/tier 1).
- 50 years and older who reside in a multi-generational household, i.e., home where individuals from two or more generations reside, such as an elder and a grandchild (1b/tier 1).

However, there are about 1.5 million people in Washington state who qualify to get the vaccine, and the state is currently getting about 100,000 doses per week. Hospitals also stated they have no idea how much of the vaccine they’re getting each week and are not alerted to shipments or shipment volumes until Sunday night for a Monday shipment, for example.

That means some hospitals like Swedish are releasing appointments weekly.

UW Medicine is booking further out and stated between Sunday and Monday that it had booked more than 10,000 seniors for appointments.

Some health care providers, like Kittitas Valley Healthcare, also stated the state’s DOH site has errors in the list of places to get a vaccine.

“The DOH link has sites in our county that were never enrolled in vaccine, and other sites that are enrolled are not listed there. So that’s probably causing some of the confusion. That site isn’t accurate at this point,” said Mandee Olsen of Kittitas Valley Healthcare.

For just about every vaccination clinic, you do need an appointment. Many say you must present your ID on-site. A questionnaire you fill out determines if you’re in the right phase, but getting an appointment is ultimately based on the honor system.

“The health care system and the vaccinators are not in the business of policing and trying to authenticate eligibility,” said Dr. Chris Dale, the chief quality officer at Swedish Heath.

The booking website reads: “Please keep in mind, falsifying eligibility takes a dose away from someone in even greater need.”

Still, Dale said based on posts they’ve seen on social media, they are aware of some people not following the rules.

“There are people who, you know, jump the line,” Dale said.

But overall, they believe patients are being honest.

“The vast, vast majority of Washingtonians respect the staging and the phasing. We all want this to get better as quickly as possible,” Dale said.

	<p>Some hospitals, such as MultiCare, offer an option for patients who live within minutes of a vaccination clinic to register and be part of an on-call list. That's in case someone misses an appointment, and there are extra doses at the end of the day.</p> <p>"At MultiCare, wastage is less than 0.25%. The Moderna vials have 10-11 doses. You're counting heads, counting appointments. However, if you have a no-show or two, MultiCare has developed an on-call list, in case we find ourselves in that situation," said Jane Altaras of MultiCare Health System.</p>
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HEADLINE	<b>01/19 Counties: not enough doses next phase</b>
SOURCE	<a href="https://komonews.com/news/coronavirus/washington-counties-say-they-dont-have-enough-doses-of-covid-19-vaccine-for-next-phase">https://komonews.com/news/coronavirus/washington-counties-say-they-dont-have-enough-doses-of-covid-19-vaccine-for-next-phase</a>
GIST	<p>The state of Washington is now allowing more people to get the COVID-19 vaccine but many counties said they don't have enough doses to get everyone in the next phase inoculated.</p> <p>"The bottom line is we need more vaccines," said Snohomish County Executive Dave Somers. "Last week, we were given an allocation of only 2,300 doses by the state."</p> <p>After complaining, he said they were only able to get a thousand more.</p> <p>At their drive through sites, Somers said they can administer up to 50,000 vaccines a week.</p> <p>"I am frustrated and find it frustrating that we're having to fight for extra doses each week," Somers said.</p> <p>It's a tough fight when you're not the only county dealing with this issue.</p> <p>In places like Whatcom County, their health department said they receive anywhere between 300 to 5,000 doses a week. Now that we are in Phase 1B1, have nearly 42,000 more people eligible for a shot.</p> <p>"This is a lot of people and we don't have enough supply of the vaccine to give to everyone at once," said Lauren Jenks, Assistant Secretary of Health.</p> <p>Jenks said the slow and unpredictable federal deliveries have contributed to these smaller distributions.</p> <p>As a state, Jenks said we get 100,000 doses a week while more than a million people can now get vaccinated.</p> <p>"The whole public health system is certainly preparing to have more vaccine than we have at this particular moment," Jenks said.</p> <p>"The timeline for vaccinating the majority of the population is still many, many months away," said Jeff Duchin, health officer with Public Health-Seattle and King County.</p> <p>Which is partly why in King County, Duchin said they are still working through Phase 1A after receiving a total of 200,000 doses since the initial vaccine delivery.</p> <p>"There is light at the end of the tunnel," Duchin said. "These vaccines represent that but the tunnel has gotten longer and we're still in it."</p>
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HEADLINE	<b>01/19 Snohomish Co. ready; but short vaccine</b>
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SOURCE	<a href="https://www.q13fox.com/news/snohomish-county-ready-to-vaccinate-30000-a-week-but-receives-just-3300-doses">https://www.q13fox.com/news/snohomish-county-ready-to-vaccinate-30000-a-week-but-receives-just-3300-doses</a>
GIST	<p><b>SNOHOMISH COUNTY, Wash.</b> - Snohomish County on Tuesday marked one year since a man walked into a health clinic, sick with a novel coronavirus after returning from Wuhan, China. A positive test the next day would confirm the country's <a href="#">first known U.S. COVID-19 patient</a>.</p> <p>"Here we are a year later, I have to say this is just a miraculous thing in the history of public health and medical science that we're talking about the difficulties of rolling out a vaccine," said Snohomish County Health Director Dr. Chris Spitters.</p> <p>As the United States reached a grim milestone of 400,000 COVID-19 deaths this same day, every day of delay in getting people vaccinated is risking lives.</p> <p>Snohomish County is confident it can ramp up vaccinations with its three operating drive-thru vaccination sites. Snohomish County Executive Dave Somers said Tuesday they can administer 30,000 doses a week at these sites right away, and ramp-up to 50,000 with more supplies.</p> <p>There's just one key ingredient missing: vaccine doses. Somers said last week they received just 3,300 doses, 10% of the current vaccinating capacity.</p> <p>"I am frustrated and find it frustrating that we're having to fight for extra doses each week," Somers said. "Last week, we were given an allocation of only 2,300 doses by the state. We complained about it and we were able to receive an extra thousand doses from another county, another facility, that helped a little bit but 3,000, 3,300, is far below the 30,000 capacity we have stood up."</p> <p>As local and state governments receive pressure to administer vaccine supply, Snohomish County fears it will quickly run out of available doses.</p> <p>The third most populated county in the state, Snohomish County makes up more than 10% of the state population. Last week's vaccine dose allocation to the county accounts for less than 3% of what the state received from the federal government.</p> <p>Q13 News has reached out to the Department of Health for comment and has not heard back at publishing time.</p>
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HEADLINE	<b>01/20 Inauguration Day</b>
SOURCE	<a href="https://www.usatoday.com/story/news/politics/2021/01/19/we-know-list-events-bidens-inauguration/4164942001/">https://www.usatoday.com/story/news/politics/2021/01/19/we-know-list-events-bidens-inauguration/4164942001/</a>
GIST	<p>WASHINGTON – Landing in the midst of a deadly pandemic, and now facing security concerns due to an insurrection attempt at the U.S. Capitol last week by a pro-Trump crowd, President-elect Joe Biden's inauguration will lack the crowds, and much of the fanfare, that those in years past had.</p> <p>In light of those two issues, the Presidential Inaugural Committee has rethought how this year's event will look. Much of it will be virtual.</p> <p>The committee is also stressing each event "will be socially distanced" and the inaugural committee "will have vigorous health and safety protocols in place."</p> <p>The inaugural committee has not released specific times for all parts of the event.</p> <p>Here is the schedule of events for Biden's inauguration on Wednesday, and the events of the days leading up to it, as we currently know it:</p>



### **Wednesday: Inauguration Day**

The departing president and the president-elect typically ride down Pennsylvania Avenue together after the incumbent greets the incoming president at the White House. However, that is will likely not happen this year as [Trump has said he is not attending the ceremony.](#)

Instead, Trump will leave the White House for Florida shortly before Biden's inauguration. Trump will hold a farewell ceremony at Joint Base Andrews, the usual jumping-off point for Air Force One, in Maryland just outside Washington before his departure from the capital city, sources said.

**8:45 a.m.:** Biden, Harris and their spouses will attend mass at Cathedral of St. Matthew the Apostle. [They will be joined by](#) Senate Majority Leader Mitch McConnell, R-Ky., Senate Minority Leader Chuck Schumer, D-N.Y., House Speaker Nancy Pelosi, D-Calif., and House Minority Leader Kevin McCarthy, R-Calif.

**10:00 a.m.-12:30 p.m.:** Our White House: An Inaugural Celebration for Young Americans

The inaugural committee will "host a first-ever curated livestream for young Americans before and during the Inaugural Ceremonies."

The livestream will be hosted by entertainer and advocate Keke Palmer, feature appearances from Dr. Jill Biden, include segments about presidential pets, excerpts of student voices from PBS NewsHour Student Reporting Labs "We the Young People" programming, and more.

**10:30 a.m.:** Biden, Harris and their spouses will arrive at U.S. Capitol for the inauguration.

**11:15 a.m., inauguration ceremony begins:** At the swearing-in, the Rev. Leo O'Donovan, a former Georgetown University president, will give the invocation. The Pledge of Allegiance will be led by Andrea Hall, a firefighter from Georgia.

Lady Gaga, who campaigned with and performed for Biden during the election, will perform the National Anthem.

There will be a poetry reading from Amanda Gorman, the first national youth poet laureate, and the benediction will be given by Rev. Silvester Beaman of Bethel African Methodist Episcopal Church in Wilmington, Delaware.

There will be additional musical performances.

Harris will be sworn in first by Supreme Court Justice Sonia Sotomayor, a history-making event in which the first Black, South Asian and female vice president will take her oath of office from the first Latina justice, shortly before noon.

Harris chose Sotomayor for the task, [according to the Associated Press](#). She'll also use two Bibles for the swearing-in, one of which belonged to Thurgood Marshall, the first Black Supreme Court justice.

**Noon, Biden sworn in as president:** Biden will be sworn in on the West Front of the U.S. Capitol building becoming the 46th president of the United States, around noon.

Following tradition Chief Justice John Roberts will lead Biden in the oath of office. He will take the oath using his [127-year-old, 5-inch-thick family Bible](#).

After Harris and Biden take their oaths of office, Biden will deliver an inaugural address to layout "his vision to defeat the pandemic, build back better, and unify and heal the nation," according to the inaugural team.

It is anticipated there will be roughly 1,000 guests in attendance. Most will be members of Congress and their guests.

**1:40 p.m.:** After the official swearing-in ceremony, Biden, the incoming First Lady, Harris, and the incoming Second Gentleman will participate in a Pass in Review on the East Front of the Capitol with members of the military.

"Pass in Reviews are a long-standing military tradition that reflects the peaceful transfer of power to a new Commander-in-Chief," the inaugural committee stated of the event.

**2:25 p.m., Arlington National Cemetery, Wreath Laying Ceremony at the Tomb of the Unknown Soldier:** Biden and Harris, and their spouses, will then visit Arlington National Cemetery to lay a wreath at the Tomb of the Unknown Soldier.

Former Presidents Barack Obama, George W. Bush and Bill Clinton, as well as former first ladies Michelle Obama, Laura Bush and Hillary Rodham Clinton, will also attend the ceremony at Arlington.

**3:15 p.m.:** Biden will then receive a presidential escort from 15th Street to the White House.

The escort will include representatives of every branch of the military, including the U.S. Army Band, a Joint Service Honor Guard, and the Commander-in-Chief's Guard and Fife and Drum Corps from the 3rd U.S. Infantry "The Old Guard."

"Participants will be socially distanced and PIC will have vigorous health and safety protocols in place," according to Matt Hill, a spokesman for the Presidential Inaugural Committee.

**Virtual Parade Across America:** A "virtual parade" will then occur, which will be televised and feature performances in communities across the country.

The parade will celebrate America's heroes, highlight Americans from all walks of life in different states and regions, and reflect the country's diversity, heritage and resilience, inaugural planners said.

The event will celebrate the nation's heroes and highlight the diversity, heritage and resilience of the country, the Presidential Inaugural Committee said Monday.

**5:15 p.m.:** Biden will sign executive orders and "other presidential actions" in the Oval Office.

**8:30 PM, "Celebrating America" Primetime Special:** The 90-minute live special will feature remarks from Biden and Harris, as well as tributes to COVID-19 first responders.

This event will replace the usual inaugural balls, which were scrapped this year due to COVID-19 concerns.

Actor Tom Hanks, who became the first major celebrity to announce he contracted the novel coronavirus last March, will host the special.

The already-announced performers include Rock icon Jon Bon Jovi, Musician/actor Justin Timberlake, Pop singer Demi Lovato and Singer-songwriter Ant Clemons, among others.

The inaugural committee named some additional artists who will perform in the television special, which include the Foo Fighters, John Legend, and Bruce Springsteen.

"Celebrating America" special will air live at 8:30 p.m. EST/PST on ABC, CBS, CNN, NBC and MSNBC. Additionally, it will be streamed live on the PIC's social media channels: YouTube, Facebook, Twitter and Twitch; and will be available on Amazon Prime Video, Microsoft Bing, NewsNOW from Fox, and AT&T DirecTV and U-verse.



The day is expected to end just before 10 p.m., when Biden and his wife will make an appearance on the Blue Room Balcony at the White House.

"This is kind of emotional for me," said Biden, choking up at the "send-off" event before taking a short flight to the nation's capital. "You've been with me my whole career, through the good times and the bad. I want to thank you for everything."

**5:30 p.m., Nationwide COVID-19 Memorial:** The inaugural committee is hosting a lighting ceremony commemorating the American lives lost to COVID-19.

The vigil will be held the day before the inauguration, with the inaugural team calling it the "first-ever lighting around the Reflecting Pool to memorialize American lives lost."

"The inauguration of President-elect Joe Biden and Vice President-elect Kamala Harris represents the beginning of a new national journey," Pili Tobar, the communications director for the Presidential Inaugural Committee, said in a statement.

Harris and Biden will both speak at the vigil.

The ceremony will also include building lightings and church bells ringing across Washington, D.C., and the committee has called on Americans across the country to join in as part of "a national moment of unity and remembrance."

"In the midst of a pandemic — when so many Americans are grieving the loss of family, friends, and neighbors — it is important that we honor those who have died, reflect on what has been one of the more challenging periods in the nation's history, and renew our commitment to coming together to end the pandemic and rebuild our nation," Tobar said.

The virus has killed around 400,000 people nationwide.

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HEADLINE	01/19 Europe, Canada approve 737 MAX plans
SOURCE	<a href="https://www.upi.com/Top_News/World-News/2021/01/19/Europe-Canada-move-to-put-Boeing-737-Max-back-in-air/5991611081734/">https://www.upi.com/Top_News/World-News/2021/01/19/Europe-Canada-move-to-put-Boeing-737-Max-back-in-air/5991611081734/</a>
GIST	<p>Jan. 19 (UPI) -- European and Canadian officials have approved plans for the Boeing 737 Max, grounded after 346 people died in two crashes, to fly again soon.</p> <p>The Boeing 737 Max was grounded worldwide for almost two years after crashes in Indonesia and Ethiopia within five months in 2018 and 2019. The aircraft's automated flight control Maneuvering Characteristics Augmentation System <a href="#">pushed both planes</a> into a nose-dive after a faulty sensor. Since then, Boeing has addressed the European Aviation Safety Agency concerns, <a href="#">the Financial Times reported</a>, including modification of the automated flight control.</p> <p>European Union Aviation Safety Agency Executive Director Patrick Ky <a href="#">said in a briefing</a> Tuesday the airworthiness directive to recertify the Boeing 737 Max to fly will be published next week.</p> <p>"We expect to publish it next week, which means the Max will be cleared to fly," Ky said.</p> <p>Ky said next iteration of the 737 Max would be enhanced to detect potentially faulty sensor reading. Recertification means the Boeing 737 Max could return to the European skies by the summer.</p> <p>On Monday, Transport Canada <a href="#">announced it's completed</a> a nearly two-year review of the aircraft and issued an airworthiness directive, allowing the models to fly again in Canada starting Wednesday.</p>

	<p>WestJet is expected to become the first Canadian airline to fly the Max again between Calgary and Vancouver on Thursday.</p> <p>In December, American Airlines and Brazil's Gol Airlines <a href="#">resumed service</a> of the Boeing 737 Max after the <a href="#">Federal Aviation Administration</a> certified the software fix and <a href="#">deemed the plane airworthy</a>.</p> <p>Recently, a U.S. Senate committee <a href="#">released new findings</a> that the FAA shirked safety protocols and retaliated against whistleblowers after a probe into the agency's oversight following the fatal crashes. Ky said that due to findings of the FAA's lax oversight, the EASA would independently assess elements on U.S. aircraft for safety.</p> <p>Transport Canada <a href="#">similarly said</a> that Boeing 737 Max plans must meet conditions specified by the country's transportation agency, including allowing pilots to disable the faulty warning system that played a role in the two fatal crashes.</p> <p>"Canadians and the airline industry can rest assured that Transport Canada has diligently addressed all safety issues prior to permitting this aircraft to return to service in Canadian airspace," Transport Minister Omar Alghabra said.</p>
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HEADLINE	<b>01/20 Iran: nuclear dispute 'ball in US court'</b>
SOURCE	<a href="https://www.reuters.com/article/us-iran-nuclear-usa/irans-rouhani-says-ball-in-u-s-court-over-nuclear-dispute-idUSKBN29P0NK">https://www.reuters.com/article/us-iran-nuclear-usa/irans-rouhani-says-ball-in-u-s-court-over-nuclear-dispute-idUSKBN29P0NK</a>
GIST	<p>DUBAI (Reuters) - Iranian President Hassan Rouhani urged the incoming U.S. administration on Wednesday to return to a 2015 nuclear agreement and lift sanctions on Tehran, while welcoming the end of "tyrant" President Donald Trump's era.</p> <p>U.S. President-elect Joe Biden, who takes office on Wednesday, has said the United States will rejoin the pact, which includes restrictions on Iran's nuclear work, if Tehran resumes strict compliance.</p> <p>"The ball is in the U.S. court now. If Washington returns to Iran's 2015 nuclear deal, we will also fully respect our commitments under the pact," Rouhani said in a televised cabinet meeting.</p> <p>"Today, we expect the incoming U.S. administration to return to the rule of law and commit themselves, and if they can, in the next four years, to remove all the black spots of the previous four years," he said.</p> <p>Tensions have grown between Tehran and Washington since 2018, when Trump quit the deal between Iran and six world powers that sought to limit Tehran's nuclear programme and to prevent it developing atomic weapons. Washington reimposed sanctions that have badly hit Iran's economy.</p> <p>Iran, which denies ever seeking nuclear arms, retaliated to Trump's "maximum pressure" policy by gradually breaching the accord. Tehran has repeatedly said it can quickly reverse those violations if U.S. sanctions are removed.</p> <p>Antony Blinken, Biden's choice for secretary of state, said on Tuesday the United States would not take a quick decision on whether to rejoin the pact.</p> <p>"Tyrant Trump's political career and his ominous reign are over today and his 'maximum pressure' policy on Iran has completely failed," Rouhani said. "Trump is dead but the nuclear deal is still alive."</p> <p>Biden appears to see a return to the deal as a prelude to wider talks on Iran's nuclear work, its ballistic missiles and regional activities. But Tehran has ruled out halting its missile programme or changing its regional policy.</p>

	<p>Biden's choice to lead the Pentagon, retired Army General Lloyd Austin, said on Tuesday that Iran posed a threat to American allies in the region and forces stationed in the Middle East.</p> <p>"The United States and other Western countries have turned our region to a powder keg, not Iran," Foreign Minister Mohammad Javad Zarif told state TV.</p>
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<b>HEADLINE</b>	<b>01/19 UK hospitals look like war zones</b>
<b>SOURCE</b>	<a href="https://www.reuters.com/article/us-health-coronavirus-britain/uk-hospitals-like-war-zones-as-covid-19-death-toll-approaches-100000-idUSKBN29P0OR">https://www.reuters.com/article/us-health-coronavirus-britain/uk-hospitals-like-war-zones-as-covid-19-death-toll-approaches-100000-idUSKBN29P0OR</a>
<b>GIST</b>	<p>LONDON (Reuters) - Some British hospitals look like war zones with doctors struggling to cope with an influx of patients infected with COVID-19, the government's top scientific adviser said, as the death toll rose by a record daily amount towards 100,000.</p> <p>The United Kingdom's official death toll is 91,470 - Europe's worst figure and the world's fifth worst after the United States, Brazil, India and Mexico. Deaths rose by a record on Tuesday.</p> <p>As hospital admissions soared, the British government's chief scientific adviser, Patrick Vallance, said there was enormous pressure on the National Health Service with doctors and nurses battling to give people sufficient care.</p> <p>"It may not look like it when you go for a walk in the park, but when you go into a hospital, this is very, very bad at the moment with enormous pressure and in some cases it looks like a war zone in terms of the things that people are having to deal with," Vallance told Sky.</p> <p>"There have been huge numbers of cases, the NHS is under enormous pressure at the moment," said Vallance, formerly head of research at GlaxoSmithKline and a professor of medicine at University College London.</p> <p>Home Secretary Priti Patel said that the death numbers were horrendous but that it was not the time to look back at the government's possible mismanagement of the crisis.</p> <p>Prime Minister Boris Johnson has been criticised for reacting too slowly to the crisis, failing to supply sufficient protective equipment and for bungling the testing system, although the United Kingdom has been swift to roll out a vaccine.</p> <p><b>COVID-19 CRISIS</b></p> <p>The British government reported a record rise in deaths on Tuesday with 1,610 people dying within 28 days of a positive coronavirus test. Currently 37,946 people are in hospital with COVID, 3,916 of them on ventilation.</p> <p>There have been calls for a public inquiry from some doctors and bereaved families into the handling of the crisis, but Johnson has resisted this.</p> <p>"Every single death is deeply tragic," Patel told LBC when asked why the death toll was so large. "There's no one factor as to why we have such a horrendous and tragic death rate."</p> <p>"I don't think this is the time to talk about mismanagement," Patel said when asked by the BBC if the government had mismanaged the crisis.</p> <p>Ministers say that while they have not got everything right, they were making decisions at speed in the worst public health crisis for a century and that they have learned from mistakes and followed scientific advice.</p>

	Loosening the UK lockdown too soon, though, would be a mistake, Vallance said.  “The lesson is every time you release it too quickly you get an upswing and you can see that right across the world,” he said.
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HEADLINE	<b>01/20 Biden to be sworn as 46<sup>th</sup> president</b>
SOURCE	<a href="https://www.reuters.com/article/us-usa-biden-inauguration/biden-to-assume-u-s-presidency-amid-deep-divisions-raging-pandemic-idUSKBN29P0HG">https://www.reuters.com/article/us-usa-biden-inauguration/biden-to-assume-u-s-presidency-amid-deep-divisions-raging-pandemic-idUSKBN29P0HG</a>
GIST	<p>WASHINGTON (Reuters) - Democrat Joe Biden will be sworn in as the 46th president of the United States on Wednesday, assuming the helm of a country beset by deep political divides and battered by a raging coronavirus pandemic.</p> <p>Biden, 78, will become the oldest U.S. president in history at a scaled-back ceremony in Washington that has been largely stripped of its usual pomp and circumstance, due both to the coronavirus as well as security concerns following the Jan. 6 assault on the U.S. Capitol by supporters of outgoing President Donald Trump.</p> <p>With only a small number of attendees present, the Democrat will take the oath of office before U.S. Chief Justice John Roberts just after noon (1700 GMT), placing his hand on an heirloom Bible that has been in the Biden family for more than a century.</p> <p>His running mate, Kamala Harris, the daughter of immigrants from Jamaica and India, will become the first Black person, first woman and first Asian American to serve as vice president after she is sworn in by U.S. Supreme Court Justice Sonia Sotomayor, the court's first Latina member.</p> <p>The ceremony will unfold in front of a heavily fortified U.S. Capitol, where a mob of Trump supporters stormed the building two weeks ago, enraged by his false claims that November's election was stolen with millions of fraudulent votes. The violence prompted the Democratic-controlled U.S. House of Representatives to impeach Trump last week for an unprecedented second time.</p> <p>Thousands of National Guard troops were called into the city after the siege, which left five people dead and briefly forced lawmakers into hiding. Instead of a throng of supporters, the National Mall will be covered by nearly 200,000 flags and 56 pillars of light meant to represent people from U.S. states and territories.</p> <p>Biden, who has vowed to “restore the soul of America,” will call for American unity at a time of crisis in his inaugural address, according to advisers.</p> <p>He will waste little time trying to turn the page on the Trump era, advisers said, signing a raft of 15 executive actions on his first day in office on issues ranging from the pandemic to the economy to climate change. The orders will include mandating masks on federal property, rejoining the Paris climate accord and ending Trump's travel ban on some Muslim-majority countries.</p> <p>In an early sign of his plan to reach across the political aisle, Biden has invited top congressional leaders, including House Republican leader Kevin McCarthy and Senate Republican leader Mitch McConnell, to join him at church on Wednesday morning.</p> <p>In a break with more than a century and a half of political tradition, Trump plans to depart the White House ahead of the inauguration, declining to meet with his successor and affirm the peaceful transfer of power.</p> <p>Vice President Mike Pence, former U.S. Presidents George W. Bush, Barack Obama and Bill Clinton, and both McCarthy and McConnell are all expected to attend Biden's inauguration ceremony.</p>

Trump, who has grown increasingly isolated in the waning days of his tenure, has still not formally conceded the Nov. 3 election. He will hold a sendoff event at Joint Air Force Base Andrews in the morning, although top Republicans, including Pence, are not expected to attend.

### GRIM MILESTONES

For Biden, who long harbored presidential ambitions, the inauguration is the zenith of a five-decade career in public service that included more than three decades in the U.S. Senate and two terms as vice president under former President Barack Obama.

But he will confront a set of overlapping crises that would challenge even someone of his political experience.

The novel coronavirus reached a pair of grim milestones on Trump's final full day in office on Tuesday, reaching 400,000 U.S. deaths and 24 million infections - the highest of any country. Millions of Americans are out of work because of pandemic-related shutdowns and restrictions.

Biden has vowed to bring the full weight of the federal government to bear on the crisis, including a more robust testing and tracing program and a massive vaccination drive. His top priority is a \$1.9 trillion plan that would enhance jobless benefits and provide direct cash payments to households. It will require approval from a deeply divided Congress, where Democrats will hold slim advantages in both the House and Senate.

Wednesday's executive actions, by contrast, are intended to advance Biden's priorities without the need for legislation.

The president will establish a new White House office coordinating the coronavirus response, revoke the permit granted to the contentious Keystone XL oil pipeline and end Trump's emergency declaration that helped fund a Mexico border wall, among other orders.

Jen Psaki, the incoming White House press secretary, said Biden plans additional executive orders in the coming weeks, including eliminating Trump's restrictions on transgender troops and reversing a policy blocking U.S. funds for overseas programs linked to abortion.

Although Biden has laid out an ambitious agenda for his first 100 days, including delivering 100 million COVID-19 vaccinations, the Senate could be consumed by Trump's upcoming impeachment trial, which will move ahead even though he has left office.

The trial could serve as an early test of Biden's promise to foster a renewed sense of bipartisanship in Washington.

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HEADLINE	01/19 Mayors 30 cities push guaranteed income
SOURCE	<a href="https://www.cnn.com/2021/01/19/the-mayors-piloting-guaranteed-income-programs-across-the-us.html">https://www.cnn.com/2021/01/19/the-mayors-piloting-guaranteed-income-programs-across-the-us.html</a>
GIST	<p>In Martin Luther King Jr.'s 1967 book "Where Do We Go From Here: Chaos or Community?" the civil rights leader discussed how to best address poverty in the United States.</p> <p>"I am now convinced that the simplest approach will prove to be the most effective — the solution to poverty is to abolish it directly by a now widely discussed measure: the guaranteed income," he wrote.</p> <p>King was not the first to propose a guaranteed income; political philosophers from <a href="#">Montesque</a> to <a href="#">Thomas Paine</a> also penned their support for what is often referred to as "universal basic income." And the idea was</p>

recently re-popularized by former Democratic presidential candidate and current New York City mayoral candidate [Andrew Yang](#).

However, King stands out as the most visible influence on [Mayors for a Guaranteed Income](#), a coalition of 30 mayors from Texas to Minnesota, who support direct, recurring cash payments for citizens and are starting guaranteed income programs of their own. The organization prominently features King's words on its website, describing its mission as "rooted" in the civil rights leader's legacy.

Mayors for a Guaranteed Income, sometimes called "MGI," was founded by Michael D. Tubbs, then-mayor of Stockton, California in June 2020 after his city [launched](#), and [later extended](#), a basic income program where 125 residents received \$500 monthly thanks to funding from the [Economic Security Project](#), a nonprofit that supports other guaranteed income experiments.

CNBC Make It recently spoke with mayors who are pushing the guaranteed income movement forward in their cities — and giving out thousands of dollars in the process.

### **Richmond, Virginia**

"When you look at 2020 and the inequities that have been illuminated this year, you've also seen the injustices that a lot of Black and Brown people have encountered for generations. It's systemic," says Levar Stoney, mayor of Richmond, Virginia where the city is piloting a program in which citizens will receive \$500 a month for 24 months. "Some people may think this is a radical idea, but I think there's nothing radical about helping people."

Currently, 18 Richmond families have been confirmed for participation after being randomly selected from a pool of [Office of Community Wealth Building](#) clients who the city has determined suffer from a "cliff effect" where the family makes too much money to qualify for federal benefits but not enough to live comfortably as measured by the [region's living wage](#). The city sent a list of participants who met that criteria to an independent research team at the [University of Pennsylvania Center for Guaranteed Income Research](#), who performed a random selection.

Stoney says that his childhood has impacted his support of guaranteed income.

"My father was a high school custodian who did not have a high school education. My grandmother was a domestic laborer working in people's homes. I was raised on my grandmother's Social Security check and my dad's very low working-class salary. As a child, I handled the finances for my family. I had to call the bank and would check and see how much money was in the checking account and sometimes they would tell me we only had \$30 left," he says. "The reason I became a supporter of MGI was because I thought about what my grandmother could have done with that extra \$500 a month. It would've meant more food and the ability for us to pay our bills."

The so-called Richmond Resilience Initiative is funded through CARES Act dollars, a [\\$240,000](#) gift from the Robins Foundation, and a recent [\\$500,000](#) donation from Mayors for a Guaranteed Income, which was itself [funded by a \\$15 million gift by Twitter CEO Jack Dorsey](#).

City representatives say that the most recent award of funding will allow the program to expand to include up to 55 families in total.

"For me, this fits right into our justice and equity agenda — ensuring that people don't fall through the cracks," says Stoney. "In Richmond, roughly 21% of the population lives under the poverty line and I believe that they, too, deserve the best that Richmond has to offer."

### **Mount Vernon, New York**

Mount Vernon, New York also received funds from Mayors for a Guaranteed Income and is expected to launch [a local program](#) on April 1 in which applicants will be chosen through a series of lotteries aimed at selecting a random, but representative group, of at least 50 households that will receive \$500 per month.



Mayor Shawyn Patterson-Howard says that interest has been high and that questions about the program's funding have been common.

"Guaranteed income moneys are not coming out of our city municipal budget," she emphasizes. In addition to the grant funds from Mayors for a Guaranteed Income, "We are working with partners, churches, civic organizations and corporations to raise money. We're also a [HUD entitlement community](#), so we are using some of our HUD entitlement moneys and Covid monies to provide that extra financial assistance right now and doing it in a way that we believe is innovative."

Patterson-Howard says that in the past, the city has used federal funds from the Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD) to help pay the rents of struggling citizens and to cover debts owed to utility companies like ConEdison.

"But we've never used HUD money to give directly to our constituents so that they could make the decisions for themselves," she says. "That's what is most innovative and empowering and restorative and dignity-giving about Mayors for Guaranteed Income than anything that we've ever seen in this country. We're used to giving a handout. I believe [Mayors for a Guaranteed Income] gives a hand up and it allows the people to make decisions for themselves."

### **The pandemic's impact**

This philosophy that direct cash payments are the [most respectful and efficient way](#) to provide citizens with the funds they need, is one that has gained significant momentum during the coronavirus pandemic, including among bipartisan lawmakers who have chosen to distribute billions of dollars of economic stimulus through direct stimulus checks, rather than alternative approaches such as tax-write offs.

While stimulus check distribution was [far from seamless](#), they proved to be [key](#) to [keeping the U.S. economy afloat](#). Perhaps the most common complaint of stimulus checks has been that they have not been [significant nor regular enough](#).

And ultimately, the pandemic has also highlighted how much Americans [need significant support](#).

"Millions of households have lost partial or full job-related income over the past year due to the COVID economic crisis. It is critical that Biden's administration, and the new Congress, prioritize a stimulus package that fills the income gap being experienced by people on the ground. The data shows that the most effective way to do this is through recurring stimulus checks," says Stacey Rutland, president and founder of [Income Movement](#), a nonprofit organization aimed at promoting universal basic income. "Ten months into COVID, it is clear that multiple stimulus checks, or a temporary guaranteed income, is going to be necessary to help compress the timeline for economic recovery."

"We want to do everything we can to mitigate some of the anxiety that comes with making ends meet in a very, very tough environment right now with the pandemic and economic downturn," says Stoney, mentioning how financial anxiety can impact people's physical health. "We are looking for economic outcomes, educational outcomes and health outcomes as well."

"This Covid crisis which swept our nation — whether you're rural, urban or suburban, whether you're White, Black, Spanish or Native American — has meant that we finally saw people, especially those in the service industry, that we've been able to ignore for a long time," says Patterson-Howard. "We need everyone and we have to find ways to move forward together. I think this is an opportunity for us to show that we not only see people, but we understand their needs. [Guaranteed income] is a way that we are going to speak to that need in a way that is unapologetic and is in a way that says 'We respect you, and we trust you, and we are here to support and empower you.'"

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SOURCE	<a href="https://www.foxnews.com/world/panel-china-who-should-have-acted-quicker-to-stop-pandemic">https://www.foxnews.com/world/panel-china-who-should-have-acted-quicker-to-stop-pandemic</a>
GIST	<p>GENEVA – A panel of experts commissioned by the World Health Organization has criticized <a href="#">China</a> and other countries for not moving to stem the initial outbreak of the coronavirus earlier and questioned whether the <a href="#">U.N. health agency</a> should have labeled it a pandemic sooner.</p> <p>In a report issued to the media Monday, the panel led by former Liberian President Ellen Johnson Sirleaf and former New Zealand Prime Minister Helen Clark said there were "lost opportunities" to adopt basic public health measures as early as possible.</p> <p>"What is clear to the panel is that public health measures could have been applied more forcefully by local and national health authorities in China in January," it said.</p> <p>China's Foreign Ministry spokesperson Hua Chunying disputed whether China had reacted too slowly.</p> <p>"As the first country to sound the global alarm against the epidemic, China made immediate and decisive decisions," she said, pointing out that Wuhan — where the first human cases were identified — was locked down within three weeks of the outbreak starting.</p> <p>"All countries, not only China, but also the U.S., the U.K., Japan or any other countries, should all try to do better," Hua said.</p> <p>An Associated Press investigation in June found WHO repeatedly lauded China in public while officials privately complained that Chinese officials stalled on sharing critical epidemic information with them, including the new virus' genetic sequence. The story noted that WHO didn't have any enforcement powers.</p> <p>At a press briefing on Tuesday, Johnson Sirleaf said it was up to countries whether they wanted to overhaul WHO to accord it more authority to stamp out outbreaks, saying the organization was also constrained by its lack of funding.</p> <p>"The bottom line is WHO has no powers to enforce anything," she said. "All it can do is ask to be invited in."</p> <p>Last week, an international team of WHO-led scientists arrived in Wuhan to research the animal origins of the pandemic after months of political wrangling to secure China's approval for the probe.</p> <p>The panel also cited evidence of COVID-19 cases in other countries in late January, saying public health containment measures should have been put in place immediately in any country with a likely case, adding: "They were not."</p> <p>The experts also wondered why WHO did not declare a global public health emergency — its highest warning for outbreaks — sooner. The U.N. health agency convened its emergency committee on Jan. 22, but did not characterize the emerging pandemic as an international emergency until a week later.</p> <p>"One more question is whether it would have helped if WHO used the word pandemic earlier than it did," the panel said.</p> <p>WHO did not describe the COVID-19 outbreak as a pandemic until March 11, weeks after the virus had begun causing explosive outbreaks in numerous continents, meeting WHO's own definition for a flu pandemic.</p> <p>As the coronavirus began spreading across the globe, WHO's top experts disputed how infectious the virus was, saying it was not as contagious as flu and that people without symptoms only rarely spread the virus. Scientists have since concluded that COVID-19 transmits even quicker than the flu and that a significant proportion of spread is from people who don't appear to be sick.</p>

	<p>Over the past year, WHO has come under heavy criticism for its handling of the response to COVID-19. U.S. President Donald Trump slammed the U.N. health agency for "colluding" with China to cover up the extent of the initial outbreak before halting U.S. funding for WHO and pulling the country out of the organization.</p> <p>The U.N. health agency bowed to the international pressure at the annual assembly of its member states last spring by creating the Independent Panel for Pandemic Preparedness and Response. The WHO chief appointed Johnson Sirleaf and Clark — who both have previous ties to the U.N. agency — to lead the team, whose work is funded by WHO.</p> <p>Although the panel concluded that "many countries took minimal action to prevent the spread (of COVID-19) internally and internationally," it did not name specific countries. It also declined to call out WHO for its failure to more sharply criticize countries for their missteps instead of commending countries for their response efforts.</p> <p>Last month, the author of a withdrawn WHO report into Italy's pandemic response said he warned his bosses in May that people could die and the agency could suffer "catastrophic" reputational damage if it allowed political concerns to suppress the document, according to emails obtained by the AP.</p> <p>To date, the pandemic has killed more than 2 million people worldwide.</p>
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HEADLINE	<b>01/19 Probe continues Whatcom oil train disaster</b>
SOURCE	<a href="https://www.kuow.org/stories/what-led-to-whatcom-oil-train-disaster-investigators-eye-equipment-tracks-even-sabotage">https://www.kuow.org/stories/what-led-to-whatcom-oil-train-disaster-investigators-eye-equipment-tracks-even-sabotage</a>
GIST	<p>Even though an oil train derailed and burned for hours that day, government officials and oil-industry critics alike say the Puget Sound region got lucky on Dec. 22.</p> <p>The mile-long train full of fossil fuel happened to spill near two refineries with specialized firefighting brigades and far from any population centers, shorelines or salmon streams.</p> <p>No one was injured when the 108-car train derailed in the small town of Custer, north of Bellingham, but about one tanker car's worth of crude oil, 29,000 gallons, was lost, either up in smoke or spilled on the ground.</p> <p>What caused the fuel carrier to go off the rails probably won't be known until the FBI and other agencies finish their investigations months from now.</p> <p>Even so, KUOW has been able to piece together much of what happened on the tracks that morning and some of the questions that tight-lipped investigators are pursuing.</p> <p>Part 1 of this KUOW investigation captured the <a href="#">tense moments as firefighters raced to evacuate a town and BNSF Railway workers rushed to stop more tanker cars from igniting</a>.</p> <p>Here, Part 2 investigates possible causes of a disaster that could have been much worse.</p> <p>Rail is a relatively safe and energy-efficient mode of transportation. Still, trains can derail, and their cargo spill, for many reasons, from poorly maintained tracks to speeding to sabotage.</p> <p>At least six government agencies are investigating the Custer crash. The FBI is leading the investigation into the causes of the crash.</p> <p>Key questions for crash detectives include: why would this train, moving just 7 miles an hour, derail, and why would its supposedly puncture-resistant tankers rupture at such a low speed?</p>

“It will likely be some time before we have answers to questions regarding the cause of the derailment and fire,” Whatcom County Executive Satpal Singh Sidhu said in a written statement.

Human error and track conditions are the leading causes of U.S. rail accidents, according to Federal Railroad Administration data, while problems handling oil and other hazardous materials are the most common federal safety violations on U.S. railways.

Retired National Transportation Safety Board investigator Russell Quimby said crash detectives would plug data from the Custer locomotive’s event recorder, similar to the “black box” recorder on an airplane, into a simulator to recreate the train’s complicated motions as it derailed.

Quimby likened a long train to a giant “Slinky” toy that stretches and contracts as it accelerates, decelerates and moves around curves. During a sudden deceleration, such as a train’s emergency brakes activating, cars mid-train can be pushed off the rails by the cars behind them.

“Usually at slow speeds, an undesired emergency will cause a train to stop, but it won’t cause cars to buckle or derail like that,” Quimby said. “I wouldn’t expect a derailment, especially like that on a straight track. It seems kind of strange to me.”

In 2017, an Amtrak passenger train derailed on brand-new tracks near Olympia, Washington, killing three, after its conductor went through a 30 mile an hour curve at 79 miles an hour.

“Speed can affect the severity, but trains can derail at any speed, even one or two miles per hour,” Herb Krohn with the Association of Sheet Metal, Air, Rail and Transportation Workers said.

### **Inspecting the tracks**

In 2016, a train carrying the highly volatile fossil fuel known as Bakken crude to Tacoma derailed and caught fire in the Columbia River Gorge. It led to the evacuation of the town of Mosier, Oregon, and contaminated groundwater 600 feet from the river.

Federal investigators found that Union Pacific’s poorly maintained tracks caused the train to go off the rails.

After that disaster, Washington Gov. Jay Inslee pushed, unsuccessfully, for daily inspections of tracks used by Bakken oil trains.

“Without these increased inspections, Bakken crude oil trains should not be allowed to travel through our communities,” Inslee wrote to the head of the Federal Railroad Administration.

In Custer, the BNSF tracks had last been inspected by the Federal Railroad Administration on Dec. 15, one week before the crash, according to Washington Utilities and Transportation Commission spokesperson Dean Pertner.

“To our knowledge no defects were found,” Pertner said in an email.

Spokespeople for the Federal Railroad Administration declined to comment on that inspection.

BNSF spokesperson Courtney Wallace said the rail company had inspected its tracks near Custer 12 days before the crash, on Dec. 10.

“Our inspector took no exceptions to the track’s conditions and found no defects,” Wallace said in an email.

Wallace said BNSF inspects that track monthly, in line with federal requirements.

Depending how a railroad owner classifies a given stretch of track, the Federal Railroad Administration requires track inspections anywhere from monthly to twice weekly. Wallace said the track in Custer is a connector, not a main line, with only monthly inspections required.

“Safety is not just a buzzword for us at BNSF,” Wallace said the day of the crash. “It’s a foundation of what we do.”

BNSF has fewer accidents or safety violations per mile than the freight-rail industry average, according to federal data.

BNSF committed 937 safety violations in 2019, the most in the previous four years, according to the Federal Railroad Administration. The agency issued \$1.9 million in penalties against BNSF that year, the least in the previous six years.

With BNSF earning \$23.5 billion in revenues in 2019, those penalties work out to less than one hour of revenue for the nation’s largest rail company.

“Federal fines are so small, they are statistically insignificant for [major freight] carriers,” Krohn said in an email. “They no longer serve as a deterrent for safety compliance.”

### **Older cars, thinner walls**

After a train carrying Bakken crude exploded and killed 47 people in Lac-Mégantic, Quebec, in 2013, U.S. regulators required railways to start using stronger, less fire-prone tanker cars.

The National Transportation Safety Board is analyzing how well the railcars in the Custer disaster performed.

According to Phillips 66 spokesperson Melissa Ory, 9 of the 10 Bakken crude tankers that derailed in Custer were older cars, retrofitted to meet the tighter federal safety standards enacted in 2015.

“Those improved rail cars were indeed the rail cars that were involved in this incident, and that likely contributed to minimizing the amount of oil that was released,” David Byers with the Ecology department said the day of the disaster.

The retrofitted cars, known as DOT-117Rs, feature multiple safety improvements over their previous versions, though they are not as beefy as the newer DOT-117J cars built since 2015.

Among other differences, the steel shells of the retrofitted cars can be 1/8 of an inch thinner than on the new cars (7/16 of an inch versus 9/16 of an inch).

The sides of newly built tanker cars are designed to resist punctures from collisions at up to 12 miles an hour. The reinforced ends of the cylindrical tanks are supposed to resist punctures at up to 18 miles an hour.

In an email, Ory said Phillips’ retrofitted cars performed as well in derailments as brand-new cars, though an industry-funded [study](#) she provided contradicts that claim. The 2019 University of Illinois study of oil-train accidents found that the retrofitted cars could be twice as likely to spill oil as the newly built ones.

“The thicker the tank car wall, the less likely it is to release [oil] in an accident,” the Washington Department of Ecology concluded in its 2020 rail transportation safety [study](#).

Oil-train critic and author Justin Mikulka said in an email that in his view, “If a train was going under 10 mph with the new cars and that still resulted in tank ruptures and fire, it is very clear these tank cars are not adequate to protect the public from this risk of this dangerous volatile oil that Washington state tried to regulate.”

In May, the federal Pipeline and Hazardous Materials Safety Administration overturned a 2019 Washington state law that would have prohibited transporting highly volatile oil, like Bakken crude, without pretreatment to make it less explosive.

Mikulka said tanker cars – both the new ones and the older retrofits – have ruptured repeatedly in recent years.

Wallace said BNSF doesn't own the cars in the oil trains that ply its tracks.

"We have been working with our individual customers to facilitate getting the newest and safest tank cars, currently the DOT-117Js, in service sooner on our railroad," she said.

### **Could it be sabotage?**

Investigators are also looking into the possibility that this crash wasn't an accident at all, but an act of sabotage.

Just before midnight on Nov. 28, about three weeks before the Custer disaster, two women were spotted kneeling on BNSF tracks near the Bellingham airport, about 10 miles south of Custer, according to federal prosecutors.

Whatcom County deputies arrested the pair and said they found a "shunting" device – a bit of wire attached to a railroad track to interfere with trains' electrical signals – installed near where the two women had been kneeling.

The women allegedly had rubber gloves, insulated copper wire and a wire brush with them.

Federal prosecutors charged Samantha Brooks and Ellen Reiche of Bellingham with a terrorist attack on a railroad facility. The two pleaded not guilty on Dec. 17 and have been free on bond.

Brooks' private attorney and Reiche's public defender did not respond to interview requests.

Brooks and Reiche have their trial date set for Aug. 30.

Until then, they must stay in western Washington — and not trespass or loiter on any railroad tracks.

Federal prosecutors said someone had placed wire shunts on BNSF tracks in Whatcom and Skagit counties 41 times since January 2020, apparently in protest against construction of the Coastal GasLink pipeline through Indigenous territory in British Columbia.

Prosecutors said shunts placed one night in October triggered the emergency brakes on a train carrying flammable gas and made part of the train uncouple from its locomotive. The FBI's Joint Terrorism Task Force has been investigating the shunt incidents.

Government and BNSF officials declined to say whether there is any link between the Custer crash and the alleged track tamperings earlier in the year.

"The investigation is ongoing," BNSF's Wallace said. "I'm not going to speculate on the investigation." Rail experts expressed doubts that a wire shunt could have caused the Custer train to derail.

"All that's going to do is tell the signal system that that section of track is occupied," rail-accident investigator Russell Quimby said. "That shouldn't have any effect, especially at that low speed, other than the engineer seeing a red [stop] signal ahead."

"There's no indication that there was any kind of signaling system issue," Seattle-based union official Herb Krohn said. His union represents BNSF Railway workers.

With the Custer oil train sitting unoccupied on the tracks for close to two hours next to a rural road, Krohn said there would have been time for someone to tamper with the train itself in ways that could have been more damaging.

Leaving a train full of explosive fuel unattended in “high-threat urban areas,” including a 10-mile radius around Seattle and Bellevue, is prohibited by the U.S. Transportation Security Administration, but it’s allowed everywhere else in Washington state.

In January 2020, an anonymous post on the anarchist website itsgoingdown.org claimed credit for disrupting rail service on BNSF tracks in Whatcom County with wire shunts.

It called BNSF’s lines, which continue into Canada, “a primo target for blockages and slow downs in solidarity with the Wet’suwet’en.”

Wet’suwet’en hereditary chiefs have fought construction of the multibillion-dollar Coastal GasLink pipeline through their territory in interior British Columbia, while the Wet’suwet’en’s elected tribal council has welcomed the pipeline.

Nearly 57 million barrels of crude oil, just under a third of all crude oil refined into petroleum products in Washington, arrived by rail in the year ending Sept. 30, [according to](#) the Washington Department of Ecology.

Ships and pipelines both carried slightly larger shares of the state’s oil.

Environmentalists say, however the state’s most-used fossil fuel is delivered, spills are inevitable.

“There’s truly no safe way to move crude oil, whether by rail or vessel or truck or pipeline. We see these accidents all the time,” said Bellingham-based environmental activist Matt Krogh with the nonprofit Stand.Earth.

Krogh said he could see the smoke plume from the Custer train fire from his home, 13 miles away.

“The real choice for safety is to move to 100% electric transportation as fast as possible,” he said.

The Association of American Railroads says the nation’s rate of rail accidents involving oil or other hazardous materials has dropped 64% since 2000.

For now, agencies investigating the Custer crash are mostly tight-lipped.

FBI spokesperson Amy Alexander declined to answer questions about the investigation.

“We are still working with our partners to determine the cause of the accident and have not ruled anything out,” she said in an email.

The Federal Railroad Administration expects to finish investigating the Custer crash in April.

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HEADLINE	01/19 Midwest ‘hotbed’ far-right extremist groups
SOURCE	<a href="https://www.ideastream.org/news/midwest-now-hotbed-for-far-right-extremist-groups-splc-says">https://www.ideastream.org/news/midwest-now-hotbed-for-far-right-extremist-groups-splc-says</a>
GIST	Two Ohioans identified as members of the right-wing Ohio State Regular Militia were <a href="#">arrested and charged</a> over the weekend for their participation in the violent insurrection at the U.S. Capitol Jan 6. Meanwhile, the Ohio Statehouse on Sunday saw a group of demonstrators espousing an anti-government ideology.

Michael Edison Hayden, spokesman and senior investigative reporter with the Southern Poverty Law Center (SPLC), said it can be tricky to distinguish between militia, anti-government groups and far-right extremists.

"It's best exemplified by the Boogaloo Movement," Hayden said.

The majority of armed protesters in Columbus Sunday, between 15 and 20 people, were identified as members of the [Ohio Boogaloo Boys](#).

"This particular group kind of straddles the line between libertarianism and white supremacy," Hayden said. "So they're a bit complicated, and the best way to understand it is they are far-right until you press them on it."

Despite the larger Boogaloo movement's [strong ties to white supremacy](#), and desire for what the group calls a "second civil war," the demonstrators at the Statehouse said they were on the side of Black Lives Matter protesters there. Leaders also said they were not aligned with either President Donald Trump or President-elect Joe Biden.

Hayden said that's a matter of political positioning.

"These groups have become much more savvy at responding to the 24-hour media cycle that is really fueled by sites like Twitter and Facebook, and their optics have changed immediately following the backlash to the violence that took place at the Capitol on Jan. 6," he said.

Beyond any other issue, though, Hayden said, guns are their priority.

"What really drives them is these Second Amendment issues, and it's not uncommon, of course, for those extreme Second Amendment issues to cross over with violent far-right extremism and white supremacy," he said. "It happens quite often."

Jessica Watkins and Donovan Crawl, both of Champaign County, were arrested on rioting charges after taking part in the Jan. 6 insurrection in D.C. as members of the Ohio State Regular Militia. That group is affiliated with the [Oath Keepers](#), a national anti-government group that, according to the FBI, "believe that the federal government has been coopted by a shadowy conspiracy." Several Oath Keepers members are [facing charges](#) related to the Jan. 6 insurrection.

Hayden said the SPLC is not on the lookout for any one group in Ohio, but rather the gradual spread of far-right extremist views. It [kicked into high gear](#) after Trump was elected president in 2016, he said.

"The Midwest, broadly speaking, has become much more of a hotbed than it was in the past, particularly along the Rust Belt," he said.

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HEADLINE	01/19 Wash. hosts first climate assembly in US
SOURCE	<a href="https://crosscut.com/environment/2021/01/washington-hosts-first-climate-assembly-united-states">https://crosscut.com/environment/2021/01/washington-hosts-first-climate-assembly-united-states</a>
GIST	<p>On the evening of Jan. 12, at the inaugural meeting of the Washington Climate Assembly, a question appeared on the screen: <i>What preferred future do you envision 50 years from now?</i></p> <p>The 90 Washington residents who had gathered together virtually began to type responses into the chat feature. Gretchen Muller, the senior associate at Cascadia Consulting Group who ran the meeting, read aloud their contributions.</p> <p>"No homelessness. Telecommuting. A future where people will listen to different viewpoints without being judged. A better future for seniors."</p>



Muller opened the floor to assembly members, and Ron\* from Moses Lake said he'd like to see more cheap or government-subsidized solar panels.

"I'm very anxious to hear other people's insights," he continued, "because as we share those and ponder them between meetings, I think we can come up with something terrific."

The Washington Climate Assembly is a first-of-its-kind experiment in the United States. Inspired by climate assemblies that have recently taken place in France and the United Kingdom, assembly members represent a sort of Washington state in miniature, and they'll spend the next two months working to reach a consensus on how to mitigate climate pollution in Washington. In March, they'll send their recommendations to the state Legislature.

The assembly's 80 residents and 10 alternates were selected by random-digit dialing of both landlines and cellphones, and hail from every congressional district in the state. They reflect the approximate racial diversity, gender breakdown and income levels of people in Washington writ large, and their views on whether climate change is happening — and whether humans are to blame for it — are similarly reflective of the mix of opinions held statewide.

State Rep. Jake Fey, D-Tacoma, publicly backed the idea of an assembly last year, along with four other state lawmakers, in an [opinion piece](#) in the Everett Herald.

In an interview, Fey characterized the assembly as "the current-day equivalent of a town hall meeting."

As the chair of the House Transportation Committee, Fey said he's curious what the assembly process shows about what average Washingtonians are willing to do to deal with climate change, what changes to transportation systems they're willing to accept and whether they'd accept carbon-related cost increases to fuels. He believes that having a diverse range of people participating in the assembly will help the conclusions from being discounted.

"It's going to hinge on getting people from different ideological perspectives to talk and be informed and come to some consensus," Fey said. "It's an experiment, but I'm supportive of this because I think that it could be more persuasive in furthering the different strategies that might be used to reduce carbon."

State Sen. Judy Warnick, R-Moses Lake, has also offered her support for the process. Warnick sits on the monitoring team of the assembly, which makes sure the group follows fair procedures. She was encouraged to join by her fellow 13th district lawmaker, State Rep. Tom Dent, R-Moses Lake.

"It will be interesting for me — I haven't been involved in a lot of climate discussion," said Warnick, who added that she believes climate change is happening and that healthy forests and air are important priorities for her district. Last year's Labor Day wildfires were the most destructive her district has seen in years.

"The amount of people that they're bringing in to have this discussion is exciting," she says. "It's not just a professor, a scientist or a political advocate; it's going to be a wide variety."

Because assembly members come from varied walks of life and hold differing beliefs, their recommendations — to lawmakers — are distinct from those suggested by activists. But the assembly is also different from a poll or a vote in that members are given several weeks to learn about the topic. They are also given the resources to ask any questions they might have.

Muller of Cascadia Consulting Group, the organization running the assembly as a neutral facilitator, said several assembly members had not previously owned a personal computer; the consultants set them up with computers and Wi-Fi. Each assembly member is offered a \$500 honorarium for participating. The assembly's learning sessions are public and will be streamed live on YouTube.

They feature presentations from experts, as well as by interested parties who can make presentations or submit policy suggestions, regardless of their expertise. The [application for presenters](#) will be open through Jan. 22, and any group or individual can submit a policy recommendation [here](#). Once the learning sessions are finished, the assembly will deliberate privately before issuing its recommendations.

While this is the first time that a climate assembly has been held in the United States, other states have experimented with assemblies to advise their governments on other issues. Oregon held a citizens assembly last year to get insight on COVID-19 priorities for the state Legislature, and two cities in Minnesota held one jointly in 2017 to study how well their local governments functioned.

Internationally, climate assemblies have become more common in the past five years. [Scotland](#) is currently holding a climate assembly that will run along a similar timeline to Washington's. Both France and the United Kingdom held national-level climate assemblies that published recommendations last year. In France, President Emmanuel Macron pledged to support 146 of the French assembly's 149 policy suggestions, and debate over their implementation is ongoing.

The Washington Climate Assembly will next meet Jan. 19 from 6 to 8 p.m. More information about the schedule can be found [here](#). For her part, Warnick said she's looking forward to the assembly because it brings together people with different beliefs in search of common ground.

"It's all about building relationships, listening to each other's ideas, and that's what has me the most optimistic," Warnick said.

\* Assembly participants are identified only by first name and location to protect their privacy. Other assemblies have publicly released the names of participants after the proceedings have finished. Gretchen Muller of Cascadia Consulting Group indicated that the Washington Climate Assembly may also do this, but has not decided as of this writing.

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HEADLINE	<b>01/19 DOH: 291,989 cases, 3940 deaths</b>
SOURCE	<a href="https://www.thenewstribune.com/news/coronavirus/article248607895.html">https://www.thenewstribune.com/news/coronavirus/article248607895.html</a>
GIST	<p>The <a href="#">Washington state Department of Health</a> reported 1,373 new cases of COVID-19 on Tuesday and 37 deaths since Friday. The state did not report data on Monday, Martin Luther King Jr. Day.</p> <p>U.S. deaths from the disease which was first reported in Washington one year ago this week topped 400,000 Tuesday.</p> <p>Pierce County <a href="#">reported 177 cases Tuesday and five new deaths</a>. Pierce County has a total of 365 deaths likely caused by COVID-19 as of Tuesday, according to the Tacoma-Pierce County Health Department.</p> <p>Statewide totals from the illness caused by the coronavirus are <a href="#">291,989 cases and 3,940 deaths</a>. Those numbers are up from 290,616 cases Monday and 3,903 deaths Friday. The case total includes 12,568 cases listed as probable. DOH revises previous case and death counts daily.</p> <p>Washington's population <a href="#">is estimated at about 7.6 million</a>, according to U.S. Census figures from July 2019.</p> <p><b>HOSPITALIZATIONS</b></p> <p>As of Dec. 31, the date with the most recent complete data, 100 people with confirmed cases of COVID-19 were admitted to Washington state hospitals.</p> <p>Preliminary reports indicate average daily hospital admissions were 114 in early January.</p>

Out of the state's [total staffed intensive care unit beds](#) (1,214), approximately 81.9% (994) were occupied by patients Friday. Of those staffed ICU beds, 19.6% (238) held suspected and confirmed COVID-19 patients.

### CASE RATES

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For the past seven days, Washington had a case rate of 27 per 100,000 people. Five states were lower. The national rate for the same period was 66.8 per 100,000, [according to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention](#).

Arizona has the highest rate in the United States at 116.9. Hawaii is the lowest at 10.1.

### VACCINE

According to DOH, 294,386 doses of the COVID-19 vaccine have been administered in Washington. As of Tuesday, 607,350 doses had been delivered to state providers and 88,725 had been delivered for the CDC's long-term care vaccination program. Of those delivered doses, 42.2% had been administered. Currently approved vaccines require two shots for maximum effectiveness.

Currently, Washington state is in [phase 1B tier 1 of vaccinations](#). That phase adds anyone 65 years and older and people 50 years and older living in multigenerational households.

On the national level, 31.1 million doses have been distributed and 12.2 million people have received the first shot of the approved vaccines according to CDC statistics from Friday. The population of the United States is approximately 328 million.

### TESTING

On Dec. 31, the most recent date with confirmed testing data, 19,883 specimens were collected statewide, with 11.2% testing positive.

The average positive test rate for the seven days prior was 10.2%. More than 4.2 million tests have been conducted in Washington. The test numbers reflect only polymerase chain reaction tests, which are administered while the virus is presumably still active in the body.

### COUNTY NUMBERS

King County continues to have the highest numbers in Washington, with 73,667 cases and 1,166 deaths. Pierce County is second in cases, with 31,164. Snohomish County has the second-highest number of deaths at 444.

All counties in Washington have cases. Only Columbia, San Juan and Wahkiakum counties have case counts of fewer than 100.

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HEADLINE	01/19 Reports: SPD violated policies at protests
SOURCE	<a href="https://www.seattlepi.com/news/article/Reports-Seattle-police-violated-policies-at-15882484.php">https://www.seattlepi.com/news/article/Reports-Seattle-police-violated-policies-at-15882484.php</a>
GIST	<p>SEATTLE (AP) — A Seattle police officer who threw a tear gas canister that hit a reporter, and other officers who threw blast balls that hit individuals during last summer's Black Lives Matter protests violated policies, according to new reports from an independent agency tasked with investigating police misconduct.</p> <p>Protests erupted in Seattle and across the country after George Floyd was killed by a Minneapolis police officer. The Office of Police Accountability received more than 19,000 complaints about police misconduct during protests.</p>

The office has released five batches of investigative reports since September, with the latest 22 cases posted Friday. To date, no officers have been disciplined for any of the sustained findings, Seattle police spokesman Det. Patrick Michaud said Tuesday.

Previous reports found that an officer who slammed a protester's head to the ground, another who punched a demonstrator in the head a half dozen times and a third officer who put his knee on the necks of two looting suspects violated policies against using excessive force.

No officers are named in the reports because the union contract with the city prohibits disclosing their identities. The latest findings are separate from three other investigations into Seattle officers by the Office of Police Accountability.

Seattle Police Chief Adrian Diaz has fired an officer who made racist remarks about a Black man last year and has threatened to fire two officers who reportedly attended the riots in Washington, D.C., on Jan. 6. Investigators are also looking into an officer who refused to wear a mask in the emergency room at a hospital.

In the latest reports, investigators found that officers and one commander violated department policies while responding to demonstrations in Seattle.

On June 1, officers were ordered to clear protestors from the area around the East Precinct and Cal Anderson Park after some in the group damaged property and threw things at police, the report said.

One officer threw a tear gas canister toward the park that landed near a news crew that was in the process of leaving the area. The canister damaged a reporter's jacket. The reporter said her crew was clearly marked as media at the time.

The officer told investigators that he did not see the group's press credentials and defended his actions, saying the use of the canister was appropriate "given ongoing assaults on officers," the report said.

But a review of videos and body cameras found that no one within the range of the officer was posing a threat or engaging in violent crimes. By throwing the canister overhand, the officer "did not exercise due care" and his "deployment appeared to be indiscriminate," the report said.

Based on those findings, investigators sustained the complaint saying the officer's actions violated policy.

Investigators also sustained findings against an incident commander who ordered officers to disperse a crowd, which led to the use of pepper spray and blast balls. Some protesters had opened umbrellas in front of a line of officers, and the officers responded aggressively.

Another officer was found to have violated policy by throwing a blast ball at a man who was lying on the ground in the park with his face covered. The device struck near the man's face and chest. His injuries required medical attention.

Investigators said the man did not pose a threat and the officer should not have thrown the device "overhand."

On the night of June 7, about 1,000 protestors gathered near the East Precinct and clashed with police. Some threw projectiles at officers and others breached the line, forcing officers to move back.

One of the officers threw four blast balls at the crowd and one hit a woman who had been standing in an intersection. Before the device was thrown, the woman had knelt on the ground several times and put her head in her hands. As she walked toward a group of people, the officer threw the blast ball and it hit her in the chest.

	<p>“It was later reported that the subject went into cardiac arrest and needed to be resuscitated three times prior to being transported to the hospital for further treatment,” the report said. Medical records revealed that several other issues were a factor, including alcohol and taking medication to treat seizures.</p> <p>Investigations found that the officer violated department policy by throwing the blast ball overhand toward a person who was unarmed and not throwing projectiles at officers.</p>
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HEADLINE	<b>01/19 DOE rejects methanol plan Columbia River</b>
SOURCE	<a href="https://www.seattletimes.com/seattle-news/state-ecology-department-rejects-permit-for-kalama-methanol-plant-on-columbia-river/">https://www.seattletimes.com/seattle-news/state-ecology-department-rejects-permit-for-kalama-methanol-plant-on-columbia-river/</a>
GIST	<p>The state Department of Ecology has denied a request for a shoreline permit required to build a \$2 billion Kalama methanol plant that would export the chemical to China.</p> <p>The permit rejection is a serious setback for a project that would be one of the Pacific Northwest’s largest industrial users of natural gas — the feedstock for methanol — and has generated intense controversy since first proposed back in 2014.</p> <p>Critics have attacked the NW Innovation Works project as a major new source of Pacific Northwest greenhouse gas emissions that would pollute for decades into a future when the imperatives of climate change call for cutting back such pollution.</p> <p>And Laura Watson, the director of the Ecology Department, cited greenhouse gas emissions from the plant as a reason for rejecting the permit.</p> <p>“I want to be very clear that a project that would increase greenhouse gas emissions by nearly 5 million (metric) tons annually would not benefit the environment ...” Watson said. “At most, this project would be less harmful than potential alternatives.”</p> <p>The plant’s developers have said the project would help displace coal-based methanol in China that produces far more carbon emissions per gallon of product, and thus would be a net benefit in the global struggle to curb this pollution.</p> <p>A state study released late last year — based on the work of three contractors — found a “high likelihood” that the project would slow the rise in global greenhouse gas emissions in the methanol industry. That savings could equal 5.9 million metric tons of carbon emissions — roughly the amount produced by 1.28 million gasoline-powered vehicles.</p> <p>That study was cited by developers as they reacted to the permit rejection. “Given the strong scientific findings and multiple reviews over the last six years, it is difficult to understand why the original vision for both economic and environmental security has been bypassed,” said Vee Godley, chief development officer for NW Innovation Works.</p> <p>In interviews last year, state officials cast doubt on those findings, saying they were based on an analysis of future markets that were difficult to predict. In the study, they noted the department’s determination that the project’s emissions are significant, a conclusion that is required for a permit to be denied.</p> <p>Watson also cited the uncertainty about how environmental and economic decisions would impact methanol markets with leaving no alternative but to turn down the permit.</p> <p>She cited the certainty of what she termed “the extremely large” carbon footprint of the project. State officials said that the plant would emit nearly 1 million metric tons of carbon emissions in state and 4.8 million metric tons globally, which would include methane releases during the production of natural gas.</p>

The state Legislature has set a 2050 target of having only 5 million metric tons of greenhouse gas emissions released from the state, which would be down from nearly 100 million metric tons of emissions in 2018.

The permit decision was celebrated by environmental groups. Brett VandenHeuvel, executive director of Columbia Riverkeeper, applauded a decision he said followed “the science and the law.” Stephanie Hillman, Northwest representative for the Sierra Club, said construction of the plant made no sense amid a climate emergency.

Officials at the Port of Kalama, where the project would be built, attacked the permit denial, and will be consulting with a legal team to “evaluate next steps.”

“It’s disheartening that after six years of robust expert review ... unnecessary barriers should continue to be raised. ... It is difficult to see the logic of this decision or the equitable application of state law,” said Mark Wilson, the port’s executive director.

The project also has been dogged by questions about how the methanol will be used in China.

Developers of the project have said the methanol would be used as a feedstock in the state’s chemical industry. But a slideshow presentation to potential investors obtained by Oregon Public Broadcasting — and shown as recently as Jan. 2019 — indicated the methanol could also be used as a fuel for industries and transportation.

The state study took all possible uses of methanol into account when determining the project’s potential for slowing the rise in global greenhouse gas emissions.

NW Innovation Works will have up to 21 days to appeal the decision to deny the permit to the Shoreline Hearings Board, which is composed of administrative law judges. If that appeal is unsuccessful, the permit decision also could be challenged through a lawsuit.

The high-profile project was once embraced by Gov. Jay Inslee as a project that could provide a boost to the Southwest Washington economy and help reduce global emissions. Then in May 2019, the governor withdrew his on a day he signed a bill banning fracking. In a written statement, he said, “I cannot in good conscience” support the methanol plant as well as a Tacoma liquified natural gas project because they would not accomplish what is necessary to combat climate change. He said that the withdrawal of his support would not affect the regulatory decision-making process.

NW Innovation Works officials also face challenges in getting federal permits. In November, a U.S. District Court judge in Tacoma struck down two Army Corps of Engineers permits because they were not the result of a full review of the impacts of greenhouse gas emissions.

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HEADLINE	<b>01/19 Convergence: police, soldier skills militias</b>
SOURCE	<a href="http://www.homelandsecuritynewswire.com/police-soldiers-bring-lethal-skill-militia-campaigns-against-us-government">http://www.homelandsecuritynewswire.com/police-soldiers-bring-lethal-skill-militia-campaigns-against-us-government</a>
GIST	<p>Thousands of police and soldiers – people professionally trained in the use of violence and familiar with military protocols – are part of an extremist effort to undermine the U.S. government and subvert the democratic process.</p> <p>According to an investigative report published in the Atlantic in November into a <a href="#">leaked database kept by the Oath Keepers</a> – one of several <a href="#">far-right and white supremacist militias</a> that stormed the U.S. Capitol on Jan. 6 – 10% of Oath Keepers are current police officers or military members. Another significant portion of the group’s membership is retired military and <a href="#">law enforcement personnel</a>.</p>



The hate group – founded by a former Army paratrooper after Barack Obama’s 2008 election – claimed “an improbable 30,000 members who were said to be mostly current and former military, law enforcement and emergency first responders” in 2016, according to the [Southern Poverty Law Center](#).

The Three Percenters, another militia present at the Capitol on Jan. 6, also draws a [substantial portion of its members from law enforcement, both military and civilian](#). Larry Brock, a pro-Trump rioter [arrested with zip-tie handcuffs, allegedly for taking hostages](#), is a retired Air Force lieutenant colonel who [posted content from the Three Percenters online](#).

The [militia movement](#) is a militarized stream of the American far-right. Its members promote an ideology that undermines the authority and legitimacy of the federal government and stockpile weapons.

When [militia members have a professional background with the military or police](#), it enhances the ability of these groups to execute sophisticated and successful operations. It also helps them convey a patriotic image that obscures the security threat they present.

### **Longstanding Ties**

The day before the Biden inauguration, two National Guardsmen deployed to Washington, D.C. were removed from that duty after an investigation [found ties to right-wing militias](#).

Far-right elements have always had some presence in [U.S. security forces](#).

Throughout the 20th century, many [local police departments were heavily populated with Ku Klux Klan members](#). The connections between terror groups and law enforcement enabled discrimination and violence against African Americans, Jews and other minorities.

In 1923, all the Black residents of Blandford, Indiana were forced out of town to an unknown location following accusations that an African American man assaulted a young girl. The unlawful “deportation” was conducted and organized by the local sheriff, a Klansman, [with the assistance of local Klan chapters](#).

Many U.S. military bases have also had [cells of neo-Nazi and white supremacist groups](#) throughout the 20th century.

In 1995, three paratroopers from Fort Bragg, in North Carolina, [were arrested and charged](#) in the killing of a Black couple in Fayetteville, Arkansas. [Two were sentenced to life in prison](#) for the murders. The Army initiated an investigation at the base, which was known for being a hub of the National Alliance, [then the country’s most influential American neo-Nazi group](#).

The Army identified and discharged 19 paratroopers for participating in hate activities. [One went on](#) to kill [six worshipers in a Sikh temple](#) in Oak Creek, Wisconsin in August 2012. He died in a police shootout.

### **Growing Convergence**

Concerns about the penetration of [far-right elements into the military and law enforcement have become acute in the last decade](#) with the emergence of militias like the [Oath Keepers](#), which was founded on the principle of recruiting police and military. Oath Keepers [pledge to disobey orders on the job which they deem contradict the Constitution](#).

The militias’ success secretly infiltrating police departments contributed to the emergence of new far-right associations that openly recruit law enforcement, like the [Constitutional Sheriffs and Peace Officers of America](#).

Founded in 2011 by former Arizona sheriff Richard Mack, the group promotes the notion – contrary to the Constitution – that the federal government authorities should be subordinated to local law enforcement. It has more than 500 sheriffs nationwide. [Just over half are currently in office](#).



The Constitutional Sheriffs and Peace Officers of America has [pushed its members not to enforce gun control laws](#) and pandemic-related [mask regulations](#) that they believe infringe on civil liberties.

### Skilled Insurrectionists

When members of far-right groups are also [professionals sworn to protect the nation or their communities](#), it makes those groups seem more legitimate.

Authorities may be less likely to treat them as domestic security threats, a categorization that would limit their access to firearms and [sensitive locations](#).

Yet military and police members actually make American militias more effective, according to [my research on the violent practices of the American far-right](#).

A data set I manage with my team at the University of Massachusetts Lowell and used for my [recent book on right-wing terror](#) shows that militia attacks are more lethal than those of other far-right groups. The perpetrators are experienced with weapons and ammunition, and have at least some military training.

Attacks by other far-right groups are, in large measure, [initiated by people with limited operational experience, who act spontaneously](#).

Militias are also more likely to attack secured, high-value targets like [government facilities](#). Timothy McVeigh, the Oklahoma City bomber, is a prime example. He was a Gulf War veteran [associated with the Michigan Militia](#) whose bomb killed 168 people at the Alfred P. Murrah Federal Building in 1995.

The penetration of far-right militants into the ranks of police and the military seems to be driving an increase in direct attacks on police and military targets.

Between 1990 and 2000, 13% of U.S. of militia attacks and plots were aimed at military or police installations or personnel, our data set shows. The proportion [jumped to 40%](#) by 2017.

And with their training in surveillance, intelligence collection and public safety, the dangerous activities of militias are generally harder for federal agencies to monitor and counter.

When militias recruit professionals, they are better at waging their radical crusade.

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HEADLINE	01/19 Lockdowns extended; concern w/variants
SOURCE	<a href="https://www.theguardian.com/world/2021/jan/19/germany-extends-covid-lockdown-amid-concern-variants-europe">https://www.theguardian.com/world/2021/jan/19/germany-extends-covid-lockdown-amid-concern-variants-europe</a>
GIST	<p><b>Germany</b> has extended and tightened its national lockdown despite slowly declining case numbers and the <b>Netherlands</b> and <b>Denmark</b> are expected to follow suit as concern mounts about new, more contagious variants of Covid-19.</p> <p>The chancellor, Angela Merkel, and leaders of <b>Germany's</b> 16 states agreed to extend the country's lockdown on Tuesday until 14 February, with new rules also making it mandatory to wear medical masks in shops and on public transport.</p> <p>Variants first seen in the UK and South Africa risked reversing a recent downward trend in infection numbers, said Merkel's spokesman, Steffen Seibert.</p> <p>In a digital summit, the German leaders agreed to carry over current restrictions <a href="#">introduced in November</a>, when restaurants and leisure and sporting facilities were closed, with schools and non-essential shops <a href="#">following</a> in mid-December.</p>

A new rule will ban people from wearing homemade cloth masks or scarves as face coverings in shops and on trains and buses, instead mandating the use of “clinical masks” including single-use surgical masks as well as [filtering facepiece respirators](#), known as FFP2 masks in Europe.

**Denmark** may also have to extend its lockdown measures beyond early February – despite a fall in infections – because of the British variant, the prime minister said on Tuesday.

The government already extended the lockdown for three more weeks last week, saying it expected the variant to be the dominant strain by mid-February. “If we don’t contain the pressure, we may risk an exponential increase in infections,” Mette Frederiksen said.

Under Denmark’s current measures, restaurants, bars and non-essential shops are closed and public gatherings limited to five people.

The **Dutch** government, [which resigned last week](#) but is staying on in a caretaker capacity until elections planned for mid-March, said it would announce new measures on Wednesday amid media speculation that it planned to announce a curfew and further localised restrictions.

The **French** health minister, Olivier Véran, said the virus was still circulating at a “worrying” level but stopped short of recommending a third national lockdown, saying France’s nationwide 6pm curfew was sufficient for now.

In **Spain**, Valencia – which like the rest of the country has been under a state of emergency [since the end of October](#) and subject to an overnight curfew – became the latest region to announce tougher action amid a surge in Covid cases. Spain reported a record rise in infections over the weekend.

Last week, Galicia banned all non-essential travel in the seven largest cities, ordered bars and restaurants to close at 4pm, and brought forward a curfew to 10pm. La Rioja closed non-essential businesses at 5pm and limited group meetings to four people, while shops in Cantabria were banned from opening at weekends.

As EU nations struggle to roll out their vaccination programmes, Letizia Moratti, the health chief of the wealthy northern region of Lombardy, sparked outrage by suggesting vaccines should be allocated to regions based partly on productivity in an effort to aid national economic recovery.

The health minister, Roberto Speranza, quickly dismissed the idea, saying everybody had a right to be vaccinated “regardless of the wealth of the place where they live” and health was a constitutionally guaranteed public good, not a privilege.

As **Russia** said its second vaccine, a candidate shot known as EpiVacCorona, [was “100% effective”](#) in early stage trials, the **European commission** announced a proposed timetable for vaccinations across the bloc’s 27 member states.

At least 80% of those aged over 80 will be given a jab by March 2021, as will 80% of health and social care professionals, it said, with 70% of the entire adult population vaccinated by the end of the summer.

In a thinly-veiled reference to the UK’s vaccination programme, the commission’s vice-president, Margaritis Schinas, said the pace of rolling out jabs should increase but that it was “not a race between countries but a race against time”.

Schinas also said the EU’s member states would agree by the end of the month on the form of a common vaccination certificate, but there were no plans to give travel rights to holders of such documents.

The paperwork will instead be used to ensure pan-European recognition of citizens’ vaccination records, although other possible uses will be debated by the bloc’s leaders at a virtual summit on Thursday.

	<p>Schinas said the use of the certificates as a passport – eagerly awaited by countries such as Greece and <a href="#">Spain</a> – was “imaginable”, but only once enough people had been covered and agreement was found between all the capitals on the conditions of use.</p> <p>An independent panel reviewing the <a href="#">World Health Organization</a> (WHO) and the global response to the pandemic concluded the WHO was underpowered and underfunded and must be reformed to give it the resources to be more effective.</p> <p>“We are not here to assign blame, but to make concrete recommendations to help the world respond faster and better in future,” the panel’s co-chair, Ellen Johnson Sirleaf, said on Tuesday, a day after its interim report was issued.</p>
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HEADLINE	<b>01/19 Europe amid pandemic faces bleak 2021</b>
SOURCE	<a href="https://www.wsj.com/articles/europe-struggling-to-exit-the-pandemic-faces-bleak-2021-11611065474?mod=lead_feature_below_a_pos1">https://www.wsj.com/articles/europe-struggling-to-exit-the-pandemic-faces-bleak-2021-11611065474?mod=lead_feature_below_a_pos1</a>
GIST	<p>Covid-19 infections and deaths remain stubbornly high across much of Europe while <a href="#">vaccination efforts are moving so slowly</a> that widespread immunity is unlikely in the region before the fall, raising the prospect of a bleak 2021 for hundreds of millions of Europeans.</p> <p>With between 3,000 and 4,000 people dying from the disease every day across the European Union in recent weeks, according to the European Center for Disease Prevention and Control, governments are prolonging and tightening antiviral measures such as curfews, remote learning and restaurant closures.</p> <p>Fears are growing, too, of <a href="#">more contagious variants of the virus</a> taking hold before governments can scale up their vaccination programs.</p> <p>“We will be very challenged at least for the next 10 weeks, and this will be the hardest phase of the pandemic,” Rudolf Anschober, Austria’s health minister, said Sunday as he announced a toughening of his country’s lockdown.</p> <p>Germany is on Tuesday set to extend its lockdown, in force since November, while adding further measures, including pressing companies to allow most employees to work from home. Slovakia will allow commuting to work only with a negative coronavirus test. France has imposed a nationwide curfew of 6 p.m. Italians are barred from traveling outside their home region for at least another month.</p> <p>The tightening restrictions are fueling frustration in many countries, and compliance is dwindling. Since Friday night, thousands of Italian restaurant and bar owners have kept their businesses open in defiance of the rules as a protest.</p> <p>“We expected the government to be able to avoid further lockdowns. But there was no real plan and we haven’t received enough financial help. And it’s clear to us that the vaccine won’t cover the bulk of the population before September,” said Umberto Carriera, who owns several restaurants in the Italian city of Pesaro and is the chief organizer of the protest.</p> <p>Many of the restaurants and bars that opened, including one owned by Mr. Carriera, have been fined and forced to shut down after police intervened. But the protest has continued.</p> <p>“We need to stay open not to make money but to cover our costs. If we don’t open now, we will be forced to shut down forever,” he said.</p> <p>European authorities promised in late 2020 that mass vaccinations would soon end the pandemic. But countries haven’t yet mounted large-scale inoculation campaigns, with only a fraction of the European population—many of them health-care workers—vaccinated so far.</p>

The EU executive, which its member countries tasked with purchasing vaccines for the whole bloc, mishandled the job of acquiring enough doses, critics say.

“The EU bought far too few vaccines. They should have ordered at least 10 times as many, and the price for that—20 to 30 billion euros—would have been negligible compared with the price of a continuous Europe-wide lockdown,” said Karl Lauterbach, a German epidemiologist and legislator.

The EU, with a population of around 450 million, had by late December ordered 300 million doses of the vaccine developed by [BioNTech SE](#) and [Pfizer Inc.](#), the first to be [authorized in Western countries](#). That amount, expected to be delivered sometime by the fall, is sufficient for 150 million people, since inoculation requires two doses.

The bloc is now negotiating the order of another 200 million doses, which would start to become available late this year.

“This was a huge mistake. We now have the worst of the pandemic in front of us in the next three months,” said Prof. Lauterbach.

A spokesman for the European Commission said Monday the bloc had placed firm orders for nearly 1.5 billion doses in a diverse vaccination portfolio, with the option to order more if needed. But most of those are vaccines that haven’t been approved yet.

The vaccination effort would be bolstered by the possible authorization on Jan. 29 of a shot developed by [AstraZeneca](#) PLC and the University of Oxford, with the bloc having preordered 300 million doses of it.

Some experts say [the continent squandered an opportunity](#) to suppress the virus when infection rates fell after springtime lockdowns. Europe could have pressed on with the strict restrictions many governments applied in the first wave of the pandemic, as many countries in East Asia did, instead aiming to live with the virus and avoid further economic damage.

“We’ve learned so little. After the first wave, nothing was done to prevent a second wave. And we are likely about to witness another surge, which is just crazy,” said Andrea Crisanti, an infectious-disease expert at the University of Padua in northern Italy. “The problem is the fundamentally wrong approach of European and other Western countries.”

Scientists say not enough was done to develop strong systems to test, trace and isolate virus carriers. Quarantine rules aimed at preventing travelers from spreading the virus, a cornerstone policy measure in Asia, have only become common in Europe this winter, albeit with varying enforcement.

Even Germany, whose pandemic management was once hailed as exemplary, is now registering record deaths from Covid-19, exceeding 1,400 a day. Uncontrolled transmission complicates vaccination campaigns because it increases the likelihood that a vaccine-resistant strain of the virus will emerge, scientists warn.

Meanwhile, Europeans are struggling to balance the risk of catching the virus with their desire to return to a semblance of normalcy.

Valeria Cigliana, a 17-year-old from Rome, returned to school on Monday for in-person lessons for the first time in months. While she hated remote learning and missed her classmates, she worries that too little has been done to avoid overcrowding in classrooms and on public transportation.

“We have been mobilizing to ask to return to school, but in safety,” said Ms. Cigliana, who helped organize socially distanced student protests in recent weeks. “If we go back to school under the current conditions, schools won’t be able to stay open.”

HEADLINE	<b>01/19 Illegal Venezuelans deportation protections</b>
SOURCE	<a href="https://www.wsj.com/articles/trump-approves-deportation-protections-to-venezuelans-in-the-country-illegally-11611108852?mod=hp_listb_pos2">https://www.wsj.com/articles/trump-approves-deportation-protections-to-venezuelans-in-the-country-illegally-11611108852?mod=hp_listb_pos2</a>
GIST	<p>WASHINGTON—As one of his final acts in office, President Trump has authorized a program to give work permits and deportation protections to Venezuelan immigrants in the U.S. without legal permission, an action President-elect <a href="#">Joe Biden</a> had promised to take during the 2020 campaign.</p> <p>The designation formally known as Deferred Enforced Departure offers legal protections to any Venezuelan national present in the U.S. as of Jan. 20, 2021, for 18 months. That is likely to benefit at least 94,000 Venezuelans in the country without authorization as of 2018, according to the Migration Policy Institute, though analysts believe the current number is likely higher.</p> <p>Mr. Trump’s move is seen as a form of pressure the U.S. government can use against Nicolás Maduro, the Venezuelan authoritarian leader whom the Trump administration has targeted with sanctions, a limited travel ban and other measures. In Jan. 2019, <a href="#">the U.S. officially recognized the country’s opposition leader</a>, Juan Guaidó, as Venezuela’s interim president.</p> <p>During the 2020 campaign, Mr. Biden said he would offer Temporary Protected Status to Venezuelan immigrants should he win the election, addressing a major ask of the Venezuelan-American community in Florida that he was courting. TPS is roughly identical to the Deferred Enforced Departure program in the protections it offers. DED is issued directly by a president, while TPS must be approved by the Homeland Security secretary.</p> <p>Republicans and Democrats in Florida have been lobbying for the move—south Florida is home to one of the largest Venezuelan populations in the U.S.—and the White House has <a href="#">long waffled over whether to take the step</a>.</p> <p>Foreign-policy officials supported granting deportation relief as a way of expressing public support for the Venezuelan people, but immigration hard-liners opposed the move, saying it would run contrary to Mr. Trump’s crackdown on unauthorized immigrants and asylum seekers.</p> <p>Despite its concerns about the Maduro government, the administration continued to deport Venezuelan immigrants at a steady clip. <a href="#">A report</a> by New Jersey Sen. Bob Menendez, the top Democrat on the Senate Foreign Relations Committee, said the administration quietly continued the deportations even after the Federal Aviation Administration <a href="#">banned direct flights</a> from the U.S. to Venezuela in May 2019. The administration used connecting flights for the deportations.</p> <p>U.S. law says immigrants shouldn’t be forcibly returned to countries where their lives or freedom would be threatened, a principle of international law known as non-refoulement.</p> <p>Likely not protected by Tuesday’s action are thousands of Venezuelans who have been forced to wait in Mexico for their U.S. immigration hearings under the administration’s <a href="#">Remain in Mexico program</a>, which Mr. Biden <a href="#">has vowed to dismantle</a>.</p> <p>About 2,600 Venezuelans have been sent back to Mexico as of 2019, according to government data compiled by the Transactional Records Access Clearinghouse at Syracuse University.</p>
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HEADLINE	<b>01/19 Officials: 12 Guard troops out of D.C. duty</b>
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SOURCE	<a href="https://www.washingtonpost.com/national-security/national-guard-members-removed-biden-inauguration/2021/01/19/4b24b7ec-5a7c-11eb-aaad-93988621dd28_story.html">https://www.washingtonpost.com/national-security/national-guard-members-removed-biden-inauguration/2021/01/19/4b24b7ec-5a7c-11eb-aaad-93988621dd28_story.html</a>
GIST	<p>A dozen members of the National Guard have been removed from inauguration duty as the federal government screens troops involved for security concerns, senior U.S. defense officials said Tuesday, one day before President-elect Joe Biden is set to take over as commander in chief.</p> <p>The troops include at least two with possible sympathies for anti-government groups, said two U.S. officials, speaking on the condition of anonymity because of the sensitivity of the issue. Ten were removed for reasons that defense officials declined to detail but said did not involve extremism.</p> <p>“These are vetting efforts that identify any questionable behavior in the past, or any potential link to questionable behavior not just related to extremism,” said Jonathan Rath Hoffman, chief Pentagon spokesman. He said that the Defense Department is proactively removing people “out of an abundance of caution.”</p> <p>“There is going to be a continued look at this,” Hoffman said. “Whether that is an internal DOD look within their chain of command or an investigation by others is something that is being determined.”</p> <p>Army Gen. Daniel Hokanson, the chief of the National Guard Bureau, declined to provide specifics about the troops alleged to have expressed common cause with anti-government groups but said they had made “inappropriate comments.” One of them was flagged because of concern within his unit, while the other was reported anonymously, defense officials said. The other 10 guardsmen were identified by the FBI, Hokanson said.</p> <p>The 12 represent a tiny fraction of the 25,000 guardsmen deployed in Washington for the inauguration following the Jan. 6 assault on the U.S. Capitol by a mob that sought to stop the certification of Biden as the next president. The group, supporting President Trump, launched an attack that led to the death of a Capitol Police officer, a woman who was shot by police, and three people who suffered medical emergencies.</p> <p>An additional 2,000 active-duty service members are involved in the inauguration in ceremonial roles, said Army Maj. Gen. Omar Jones, the commander of the Military District of Washington. Those troops are credentialed by the Secret Service and have been reduced in number by about 3,500 over a typical inauguration because of the pandemic, he said.</p> <p>Democratic lawmakers have sought vetting of National Guard members deployed for the inauguration since the riot, citing the arrest of numerous veterans in the mob, including a current member of the Virginia National Guard and an Army reservist. The names of guardsmen supporting the inauguration were sent to the FBI for screening as an additional precaution.</p> <p>The scrutiny over extremist group activity within the ranks has helped generate leads from alert citizens, city officials said.</p> <p>A passerby at the D.C. Armory parking lot noticed a truck bearing a sticker for the Three Percenters, a right-wing anti-government group, and alerted Charles Allen, a District councilman.</p> <p>Allen referred the matter to city security officials and a senior D.C. Guard official, and it appeared law enforcement was now involved, he said. The Three Percenters “has no home in the District of Columbia,” Allen said.</p> <p>It is unclear whether the driver, whose truck bears Virginia plates, was one of the troops removed from duty. Cotton Puryear, a spokesman for the Virginia National Guard, declined to comment, citing cooperation with law enforcement.</p> <p>For years, defense officials have said that they do not tolerate extremism in the ranks — a point that senior defense officials repeated Tuesday.</p>



After racial justice protests last summer, the Pentagon established a new Department of Defense Board on Diversity and Inclusion, which found in its initial report in December that more research is needed to address the infiltration of extremist ideologies in the U.S. military.

During the inauguration, the guardsmen will play a key role in forming a fenced outer security perimeter that stretches for miles and includes the Capitol and White House.

Most of the guardsmen — triple the number deployed during Trump's inauguration four years ago — are armed with rifles, with magazines of ammunition on hand but not in the weapon as a safety precaution. Inside the perimeter, the Secret Service and other authorities will serve as additional layers of security.

Guardsmen closer to the inner workings of the inauguration, like those overseeing access points, may receive higher levels of screening, said Michael Taheri, a retired Air Force major general and former director of staff for the National Guard Bureau.

Background checks for service members have broadened in recent years to include social media activity and more frequent monitoring, Taheri said, mirroring how private companies comb online behavior for prospective hires.

"My guess is there is a lot of open stuff out there," he said.

The removal of the guardsmen comes after some leaders have taken exception to the additional vetting.

Gov. Greg Abbott (R-Tex.) tweeted Monday that the screening of National Guard members for extremist ties is "the most offensive thing I've ever heard."

"I authorized more than 1,000 to go to DC," he tweeted. "I'll never do it again if they are disrespected like this."

But other lawmakers have questioned whether having the National Guard involved is safe.

Rep. Steve Cohen (D-Tenn.) said in an interview on CNN on Monday that guardsmen who did not vote for Biden are in "the large class of people who might want to do something" threatening at the inauguration. Facing a backlash, Cohen said Tuesday in a statement that he appreciated the assurance the National Guard's presence "provides that we will have a successful inauguration."

Jim Golby, an Army veteran who studies civil-military affairs at the University of Texas at Austin, said he is confident that the National Guard will perform professionally and admirably on Inauguration Day. The military, he said, "understands what is at stake and remains committed to carrying out its duties in a nonpartisan manner."

Golby said that service members are accustomed to carrying out orders they may not personally like.

"There are always risks, and there is always the potential for individuals to make terrible choices," he said. "But I'm confident members of the National Guard are taking their duties seriously and doing all they can to mitigate potential risks."

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HEADLINE	01/19 FAA approves airport virus screenings
SOURCE	<a href="https://www.washingtonpost.com/local/trafficandcommuting/coronavirus-airport-screenings/2021/01/19/6657d426-5a87-11eb-b8bd-ee36b1cd18bf_story.html">https://www.washingtonpost.com/local/trafficandcommuting/coronavirus-airport-screenings/2021/01/19/6657d426-5a87-11eb-b8bd-ee36b1cd18bf_story.html</a>



## GIST

The airport in Cedar Rapids, Iowa, plans next week to begin screening passengers for symptoms of covid-19 before they go through security, implementing a first-of-its-kind plan that was on hold for months while federal officials reviewed its funding.

The top executives of Eastern Iowa Airport wanted to use coronavirus relief money to check passengers for symptoms and won approval from local authorities in July. But airport revenue is strictly regulated, and the officials [did not want to move forward](#) without approval from the Federal Aviation Administration.

In late December, the agency gave its approval. The decision opens the door for the nation's 500-plus other airports to implement screening programs.

"We're excited to get this launched," said Marty Lenss, the director of the Cedar Rapids airport. "We've been working on it for a while. We have always looked at it as one more layer in a multilayered approach in restoring passenger confidence."

On Tuesday, Lenss said fixtures for the screenings were being installed, and staffers were being shown around ahead of Monday's launch. The cost will be covered by a portion of the \$23 million the airport received in [coronavirus](#) relief funding.

The mandatory screening would build on efforts by airlines to try to keep sick people off flights. Airlines typically require self-declarations and mask-wearing by passengers but do not conduct professional health screenings or require coronavirus testing of domestic passengers.

The United States on Jan. 26 is to require [passengers arriving from other countries to have evidence of negative coronavirus testing](#), adopting a measure that has been in place in many countries for months.

And after the Trump administration moved Monday to end restrictions on travel from Brazil and much of Europe on that same date, Jen Psaki, the incoming White House press secretary, said the Biden administration had a different plan.

"On the advice of our medical team, the Administration does not intend to lift these restrictions on 1/26," she [wrote on Twitter](#). "In fact, we plan to strengthen public health measures around international travel in order to further mitigate the spread of COVID-19."

In Cedar Rapids, screeners from a local health-care group, Mercy Medical Center, will ask travelers questions about their health and potential exposure to the coronavirus, and also take their temperatures. The first step should take 10 seconds.

Anyone who fails the initial screening will be subject to a second review, which Lenss said in a few weeks could include rapid testing. Those who seem sick would be urged not to travel and be referred back to their airline, which would make the final decision.

Tim Sagers, Mercy's medical director, said the program could be a model for other communities.

"We've seen that travelers around the country may be apprehensive about air travel," he said. "Our aim in this partnership is to provide further assurance that those who fly are as safe as possible."

In at least two cases, [people have died of covid-19 aboard planes](#) in the United States, and thousands are suspected of having been exposed to the novel coronavirus, the pathogen that causes the disease, during air travel.

Over time, the value of screening people for the disease has become less clear, as it can be readily spread by those who are infected but not displaying symptoms. The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention [shut down screenings for some international passengers in September](#) after detecting just nine cases among 766,000 people who were screened.

<a href="#">Return to Top</a>	<p>Lenss said he recognizes that the program will not be perfect.</p> <p>“I’m sure we’re going to learn something,” he said. “We’ve never seen this as a silver bullet by itself.”</p> <p>The FAA determined that the screenings would be a legitimate use of airport revenue as long as they were conducted by trained medical personnel and not offered to the public at large.</p> <p>“Airports may voluntarily choose to take such actions in an attempt to jump-start and support the recovery of airport operations and airport services,” the agency wrote in <a href="#">a guidance document</a>.</p> <p>Eastern Iowa Airport is relatively small, not ranking among the 100 busiest in the nation in a typical year. But it is served by three of the four major carriers, as well as by two low-cost airlines. American Airlines, United Airlines, Frontier Airlines and Allegiant Air expressed support for the program.</p> <p>Hilarie Grey, a spokeswoman for Allegiant, said, “We look forward to seeing how it will work in the operational environment in the coming weeks.”</p> <p>In the new guidance, the FAA said airports should get the support of airlines and local health authorities before setting up screening programs.</p> <p>Pramod Dwivedi, the director of public health for Linn County, where the Iowa airport is located, said authorities supported the program as a way of reducing the spread of the virus through air travel, saying in a statement that it is “instrumental in reducing air travel related COVID-19 transmissions.”</p>
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HEADLINE	<b>01/19 China builds massive quarantine center</b>
SOURCE	<a href="https://www.washingtonpost.com/world/2021/01/19/china-quarantine-center-coronavirus/">https://www.washingtonpost.com/world/2021/01/19/china-quarantine-center-coronavirus/</a>
GIST	<p>China is racing to build a quarantine center to house 4,000 people in the northern city of Shijiazhuang, the epicenter of the country’s latest outbreak of the <a href="#">coronavirus</a>, which Beijing has largely contained at an enormous cost to its 1.3 billion people.</p> <p>While much of the world is reporting record numbers of infections, hospitalizations, deaths and disruptions related to the coronavirus, China, the original site of the virus, has avoided a massive resurgence alongside overseeing <a href="#">an economic revival</a>. But it has done so by mandating mass surveillance and periodic lockdowns of entire cities and towns at the first report of new cases.</p> <p>Despite these efforts, cases of the virus continue to pop up. China has recorded over 100 daily new cases for the past seven days, marking its worst domestic outbreak since March, according to Reuters. At least 11 regions in three Chinese provinces are on lockdown, China’s state-owned <a href="#">Global Times</a> <a href="#">reported</a> Monday.</p> <p>The government is on edge ahead of the Lunar New Year in mid-February, when millions of people in China typically travel to celebrate with friends and family.</p> <p>This time last year, reports of a mysterious pneumonia-like virus circulating in Wuhan, China, were raising alarms across Asia. Then on Jan. 23, China ordered a massive, months-long lockdown of 11 million people in Wuhan and the greater Hubei province. In those early days, Chinese workers rushed to build massive quarantine centers and field hospitals alongside implementing mass testing and surveillance measures.</p> <p>It is a model that China has since replicated across the country over the past year. In Shijiazhuang, the capital of Hebei province, officials are preparing to move entire villages into the quarantine center if</p>

	<p>needed, <a href="#">Agence France-Presse reported</a>. Close contacts of people confirmed to have the virus will begin to be relocated to the facility when it is completed in the coming days.</p> <p>Construction began on Jan. 13 after officials put Hebei province's 11 million residents under lockdown while rolling out mass testing and quarantines. Since early January, the province has reported over 600 cases, the majority of which have been in Shijiazhuang, according to NPR.</p> <p>Under the current restrictions, anyone who leaves the area must show a negative coronavirus test within the past three days. Close contacts of people who have tested positive are required to quarantine. Last week, around 20,000 people from 12 rural villages were bused to government-run quarantine centers, <a href="#">NPR reported</a>. In three major cities, including Shijiazhuang, people are not allowed to leave their homes.</p> <p>Hebei province also borders Beijing, which authorities are particularly keen to keep virus-free. As part of the latest measures, only Hebei travelers with proof of work in the capital are allowed to enter.</p> <p>Chinese authorities have not announced a specific source of the outbreak. However, many of the initial cases were detected in villages around Shijiazhuang's international airport, NPR reported.</p>
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HEADLINE	<b>01/19 US-bound caravan thwarted in Guatemala</b>
SOURCE	<a href="https://www.washingtonpost.com/world/the_americas/us-bound-caravan-thwarted-in-guatemala-as-pressure-against-migrants-continues/2021/01/19/fcc1fc8e-5a5f-11eb-a976-bad6431e03e2_story.html">https://www.washingtonpost.com/world/the_americas/us-bound-caravan-thwarted-in-guatemala-as-pressure-against-migrants-continues/2021/01/19/fcc1fc8e-5a5f-11eb-a976-bad6431e03e2_story.html</a>
GIST	<p>MEXICO CITY — Most of the thousands of migrants who left Honduras for the United States on foot last week have been turned around in Guatemala. By Tuesday morning, more than 3,000 had been detained or forcibly sent back by security forces.</p> <p>Some in the caravan were aware that President-elect Joe Biden was days away from taking office in Washington and were hopeful that he would make it easier for migrants to enter the United States. But others were oblivious to the political context.</p> <p>For most, it was their own plight — poverty, security threats, the <a href="#">pair of hurricanes that devastated the Central American nation</a> — that compelled them to join the caravan.</p> <p>The show of force by Guatemalan authorities was yet another sign of the crackdown on migration through Central America and Mexico that has intensified at the behest of the Trump administration.</p> <p>For years, migrants saw joining a caravan as a safe and affordable alternative to paying a human smuggler, who might charge more than \$10,000 for the journey north and mistreat them along the way. But the method no longer appears viable, as caravans now run headlong into a militarized response by Central American and Mexican security forces, under pressure from Washington and fighting a pandemic.</p> <p>The most recent caravan, the largest in a year, left from a bus station in the city of San Pedro Sula in northern Honduras on Friday. The migrants included families whose <a href="#">homes were destroyed in the two hurricanes</a> that swept through the country in November. Others had lost their jobs in hotels and restaurants on the island of Roatán, frequented by tourists until the <a href="#">coronavirus</a> pandemic. Still others were fleeing acute threats from violent criminal gangs.</p> <p>Lucy Cervello joined the group with her husband and three children from the city of La Lima.</p> <p>“The hurricane destroyed everything we own. We’ve been homeless since November,” said Cervello, 32. “We don’t have enough to eat anymore. The government has done nothing to help.”</p>

Cervello had heard migrants talk about Biden, but she didn't know who he was or what was supposedly changing in the United States. Her daughter, Marjorie, was mourning the family's dog, Princess, who had drowned in one of the storms.

Conservative commentators in the United States have reduced the migrants' motivations to a pure political calculus, suggesting that Biden's election was the major reason for the caravan's formation. History and interviews on the ground suggest otherwise. Before the region locked down against the coronavirus, caravans formed periodically during Trump's presidency. While they are often organized by local activists and gain steam on social media, political awareness among the groups is often limited.

The number of migrants apprehended at the U.S. border has remained relatively steady since Biden's election, [rising only slightly from 71,726 in October to 73,513 in December](#). Those numbers — which include multiple entries for migrants who are rapidly expelled under a pandemic-era policy and attempt to cross again — remain far below the recent spike of 144,116 in May 2019.

Before Marlon Wood left to join the group from Roatán, he posted a photo of his family on Facebook. The 23-year-old planned to find work in the United States so he could send money back to them.

"You are the reason why tomorrow I decide to leave my country to have a better life," he wrote. "God knows my heart and knows everything I have done and suffered for you all."

Citizens of Guatemala, Honduras and El Salvador normally enjoy freedom of movement among the three countries. But because Guatemala now requires a negative coronavirus test upon arrival, the Honduran migrants were stopped at the border. Still, most of the caravan pushed through the crossing.

Guatemala's foreign minister, Pedro Brolo, said their entry "violated national sovereignty."

Thousands made it across Guatemala's border and continued north. But less than 100 miles later, they were stopped at several military checkpoints. Photos and videos showed security personnel beating migrants back with batons.

Jordan Rodas, the human rights ombudsman in Guatemala's attorney general's office, called the response "deplorable."

Authorities said 3,329 people have been detained or returned to Honduras. Some smaller groups have attempted to continue north. But the chances that a substantial group could make it through not only Guatemala but also Mexico, where security forces have already deployed, were slim.

Partly in response to threats from the Trump administration, both Guatemala and Mexico have increased their efforts to combat the transit of migrants through their countries. The Biden administration has not said whether it will continue the pressure, but incoming officials have said that newly arrived migrants will not be able to immediately enter the United States to apply for asylum.

Efforts to deter caravans have also drawn domestic support in Mexico and Central America.

"Some communities had once been supportive of caravans but reached a point where it was too much," said Maureen Meyer, vice president for programs at the Washington Office on Latin America.

"We've now had three caravans over the last year stopped either in southern Mexico or Guatemala, which suggests that it's no longer as possible as it once was to travel this way," she said. "The coordination between governments around this caravan suggests there's not a lot of appetite within these countries for these large movements of people."

Mexican officials say they are not stopping the flow of migrants merely as a favor to the United States, but in an effort to streamline their own migration system and minimize public health risks during the pandemic.

	<p>“We are going to continue acting the same way,” President Andrés Manuel López Obrador said Monday.</p> <p>Many of the migrants are being sent back to precarious conditions. Some of the hurricane victims are living in tents provided by foreign donors; others are squatting on the floors of local schools.</p> <p>“Some days we eat one meal,” said Wendy Treches, 40, the day before she left with the caravan. “Some days we eat nothing.”</p> <p>She was traveling with her three children after her house in the city of Santa Bárbara was destroyed by the storms.</p>
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HEADLINE	<b>01/19 Violence in Sudan Darfur region dims hope</b>
SOURCE	<a href="https://www.nytimes.com/2021/01/19/world/africa/sudan-darfur-violence.html">https://www.nytimes.com/2021/01/19/world/africa/sudan-darfur-violence.html</a>
GIST	<p>NAIROBI, Kenya — Hundreds of people have been killed or injured in violence that enveloped Sudan’s Darfur region in recent days, dampening hopes for long-lasting peace in an area that has been plagued by fighting and instability for decades.</p> <p>The violence came just weeks after peacekeepers with the United Nations and the African Union started a phased withdrawal after 13 years in the region.</p> <p>The withdrawal plan was set after some rebel groups in Darfur signed a peace agreement with Sudan’s transitional government, which came to power in 2019 when a popular revolution brought down <a href="#">longtime President Omar al-Bashir</a>. The International Criminal Court has charged Mr. Bashir over atrocities committed by his forces and allied militias in the long-running war in Darfur.</p> <p>The recent violence began after an argument in which a man was stabbed to death, <a href="#">the prime minister’s office said</a>. Armed militias then attacked the western city of El Geneina and <a href="#">besieged a camp for internally displaced people</a>. By Sunday, 83 people had been killed and 160 others wounded, including children and members of the security forces, the Sudanese doctors’ union <a href="#">said in a tweet</a>.</p> <p>Over 50,000 people <a href="#">were displaced</a> from the camp and nearby villages and towns, the United Nations said. The clashes are the latest in a region that for nearly two decades has been blighted by conflict and violence. The fighting began in 2003, when rebels rising up against political and economic marginalization of African ethnic minorities by Sudan’s Arab majority launched an insurgency against Mr. al-Bashir’s government.</p> <p>Mr. al-Bashir responded by mobilizing both the Sudanese military and the Janjaweed, a militia drawn from local Arab tribes, which waged a campaign of rape, murder and ethnic cleansing in Darfur.</p> <p>The conflict led to the deaths of more than 300,000 people, with 2.7 million others displaced from their homes, according to the United Nations.</p> <p>In response to the recent violence, the authorities declared a state of emergency and imposed a curfew in the region. The government also sent a delegation including the attorney general and members of the military and justice ministry to investigate and restore calm.</p> <p>The international community called on the government to de-escalate the situation, which analysts described as a stark failure of the new government to keep the region safe.</p> <p>“The government comprehensively failed its first real test of maintaining security,” said Jonas Horner, a senior Sudan analyst with the International Crisis Group.</p>

The violence comes almost two years after Mr. al-Bashir was removed from office in a coup, after which a transitional government [promised to investigate](#) the atrocities committed in the region under his reign. Since March 2009, he was been the subject of an arrest warrant issued by the International Criminal Court, but the government so far has not turned him over.

Last August, the transitional government signed a [milestone peace agreement](#) with all but a few of the rebel groups. In the wake of that deal, the United Nations-African Union mission in Darfur [said in December that it would end its mission](#) in the region, hand over operations to the Sudanese government and withdraw all of its uniformed and civilian personnel by June.

The announced withdrawal of the peacekeeping forces drew opposition from some leaders in the region and civil society organizations at the time. The African Union and some members of the U.N. Security Council, including France and Britain, expressed concern that the troop departure might create a security void.

The rapid mushrooming of the latest conflict from a market fistfight into a violent interethnic episode “illustrates the persistent insecurity in Darfur as well as the folly of the Sudanese government’s premise that security in the region had improved sufficiently” for the peacekeepers to leave, said Mr. Horner, the analyst.

The United Nations secretary-general, António Guterres, urged Sudan’s government to [de-escalate the situation surrounding the most recent violence](#).

Such [inter-communal violence](#) in Darfur doubled during the second half of 2020, and West Darfur, of which El Geneina is the capital, accounted for half the reported cases, [according to the U.N. Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs](#).

The Sudanese Professionals Association, a body that represents 17 national trade unions, called on the authorities to hold accountable the perpetrators of the recent violence.

“This heinous, treacherous attack must not pass without bringing the criminals involved in it to accountability and speedy trials,” the professionals association [said on Twitter](#). It called for “drastic measures” to be taken to prevent further violence, including deploying security forces, disarming tribes and setting up a reconciliation commission among communities.

For now, the situation remains delicate. The newly imposed curfew has hindered the movement of doctors and the availability of blood, [according to the Sudanese doctors’ union](#).

And on Monday, the organization Save the Children lamented the state of the region’s health facilities that were treating the wounded.

“We have seen disturbing photos of injured and dying people on the floors and corridors of hospitals,” Arshad Malik, the head of the organization’s Sudan office, [said in a statement](#). He also said there had been “reports of large numbers of injured people arriving at health facilities with few medical staff to attend to them.”

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HEADLINE	<b>01/19 Powerful winds spark new blazes in Calif.</b>
SOURCE	<a href="https://www.theguardian.com/us-news/2021/jan/19/california-fire-climate-crisis-high-winds">https://www.theguardian.com/us-news/2021/jan/19/california-fire-climate-crisis-high-winds</a>
GIST	<p>Unusually warm and dry conditions coupled with powerful wind gusts have ignited a spate of winter wildfires that call into question the idea that <a href="#">California</a> has a “fire season” at all any more.</p> <p>Residents of several communities in the Santa Cruz mountains were <a href="#">ordered to evacuate</a> by the local sheriff’s office Tuesday morning as California’s fire agency, Cal Fire, responded to more than a dozen</p>



new vegetation fires across the area. Some of the fires were ignited when power lines were toppled by high winds; others were wind-driven reignitions of areas that burned in 2020, Cal Fire [said](#). By midday Tuesday, six fires in the area were still burning.

The evacuations came as Californians grappled with the latest example of the reality of climate crisis: [red flag warnings](#) – the National Weather Service’s highest level of caution for wildfire activity – across much of the state in January. The early start to 2021’s fires follows 2020’s record-breaking year, which saw wildfires that burned approximately 4.26m acres and killed 33 people.

“We’re not seeing ‘fire season’ any more,” said Issac Sanchez, battalion chief of communications for Cal Fire Sacramento. “It’s just one big fire year, where we can be prepared for and expect a large destructive fire at any point.”

While it’s not unusual for fires to start at any point in the year, what is concerning now is the warmer, drier weather and receptive vegetation that could allow those fire starts to spread, Sanchez said. Add in the powerful and dry winds – which [reached 100 mph](#) near Sacramento overnight – and you have all the ingredients for fire.

“The fact that the winds are blowing is not unusual, but what is unusual is the higher temperatures and dry conditions,” Sanchez said. “We’re just not seeing enough rain to turn the corner.”

A vegetation fire in Kern county, about 100 miles north of Los Angeles, grew to 200 acres Tuesday afternoon, with “rapid spread” caused by winds nearing 50 mph, the [local fire department said](#).

The warm winter weather has seen decades-old single-day temperature records fall in [Los Angeles](#) and [San Francisco](#), according to the National Weather Service. This follows a 2020 that was the [hottest year on record](#), according to Nasa.

Local utilities have [turned off the electricity](#) for tens of thousands of residents, most of them in southern California, due to the risk of high Santa Ana winds downing power lines and igniting fires. The so-called “public safety power shutoffs” are an increasingly common fire prevention tactic for the state’s utilities in the wake of the deadly Camp fire in Paradise, California, which was [started by Pacific Gas & Electric’s faulty equipment](#) and killed 85 people.

An additional 260,000 customers are at risk of losing their power in southern California, according to Southern California Edison.

Daniel Swain, a climate scientist at UCLA’s Institute of the Environment and Sustainability, [called](#) the overnight fire starts in northern California “nothing short of incredible” for this time of year.

“As California’s wildfire crisis escalated in recent years, I have speculated with climate & fire colleagues that we might start to see wind-driven \*winter\* wildfire outbreaks in NorCal,” he [said on Twitter](#). “2021 is empirically demonstrating that answer to that question is: yes. Wow.”

Sanchez called on the public to adjust to the new reality of year-round fire.

“We don’t have a time of year when we’re not prepared to aggressively respond, and we need the public to be prepared right there with us,” he said, urging homeowners to perform necessary maintenance of defensible spaces and all residents to be prepared for possible evacuations.

“They need to recognize that the fact that it’s January doesn’t make a difference anymore.”

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SOURCE	<a href="https://www.theguardian.com/us-news/2021/jan/19/california-water-bills-affordability-debt-crisis">https://www.theguardian.com/us-news/2021/jan/19/california-water-bills-affordability-debt-crisis</a>
GIST	<p>The magnitude of America's water affordability crisis has been laid bare by shocking new data from <a href="#">California</a> where debt owed on water bills has hit \$1bn and one in every eight households is currently in arrears.</p> <p>A survey by the state water board found at least 1.6m households are behind on water bill payments. The average debt is \$500, but 155,000 or so households are in real trouble, owing more than \$1,000 each and accounting for half the total debt.</p> <p>California is America's most populous state and even before the pandemic, a third of residents, about 13 million people, lived in poverty.</p> <p>Water debt – like other poverty indicators – is not evenly distributed.</p> <p>Households in predominantly Black and Latino neighborhoods are more likely to be in arrears, and have disproportionately larger debts. Racial inequalities in California's water debt persist even after adjusting for income and housing, <a href="#">the survey found</a>. The highest concentration of arrears is in southern California, particularly in Los Angeles – one of the cities <a href="#">hardest hit by Covid-19 deaths</a> and the economic fallout.</p> <p>The pandemic did not create California's water affordability crisis, but the debt has ballooned since the governor, Gavin Newsom, ordered a moratorium on water shutoffs for unpaid bills last April, as part of the state's public health measures to curtail the spread of Covid-19, which is highly contagious.</p> <p>Low-income households hit hard by the pandemic are probably prioritizing food, medication, and other basic necessities over paying their water bill.</p> <p>Covid cases and deaths are once again surging in California – and most other states – but things could be <a href="#">even worse without the moratorium on water shutoffs</a>.</p> <p>In 2019, at least half a million California residents had their taps turned off after falling behind in bill payments, according to figures provided by the water board. Gaps in the data mean the actual number of people denied access to water was almost certainly much higher.</p> <p>The moratorium will continue until Newsom declares an end to the Covid emergency, but there's currently no provision for how or when the accumulating debts will be paid.</p> <p>Advocates fear a wave of mass shutoffs after the moratorium expires.</p> <p>"These shocking and sobering statistics contain a simple message: if we do not act, California will soon experience a drinking water catastrophe of devastating proportions. The painful truth is the very same communities already hit the hardest by the pandemic will also face the worst of the water shutoffs crisis," said Jonathan Nelson, the policy director for the California-based Community Water Center.</p> <p>It's not just residents who are struggling. Water utilities are struggling to stay afloat as they rely on customer revenue to cover operation and maintenance costs.</p> <p>The water board on Tuesday warned that 25 small and medium-sized water utilities – about 1% of the total number – could go under within 180 days without government financial intervention.</p> <p>"Some utilities are deferring capital investments and maintenance; others are drawing down their reserve funds ... smaller water systems are financially vulnerable and may require assistance to maintain operations within the next six months," said Darrin Polhemus, the deputy director of the division of drinking water at the state water board.</p> <p>Covid has underlined the <a href="#">importance of access to clean water</a>, but the affordability crisis has been brewing for the past decade.</p>

[A landmark national investigation](#) by the Guardian last year found millions of Americans are struggling to afford running water due to rapidly rising bills and inadequate financial assistance.

[Analysis of 12 US cities](#) – including San Diego and San Jose in California – found the combined price of water and sewage increased by an average of 80% between 2010 and 2018, with more than two-fifths of residents in some cities living in neighborhoods with unaffordable bills.

The rising cost of water is directly linked to national politics.

Federal funding for water systems has fallen by [77% in real terms since its peak in 1977](#) – leaving local utilities to raise the money that is needed through bill hikes in order to upgrade ageing infrastructure, comply with safety standards for legacy and emerging contaminants like PFAS, lead and nitrates, and adapt to extreme weather conditions linked to the climate crisis.

The cost burden has fallen disproportionately on low-income households, as benefits and wages have stagnated over the past decade. Evidence suggests [communities of color are disproportionately](#) affected by punitive measures by utilities such as shutoffs and foreclosures linked to water debt.

California has often been ahead of the curve on water issues.

In 2012, state lawmakers passed the Human Right to Water Act, establishing the right to safe, clean, affordable and accessible water adequate for human consumption, cooking and sanitary purposes.

Since then some progress has been made, but water is increasingly scarce as California's snowpack shrinks due to rising temperatures and droughts have become more frequent and severe. Meanwhile, more than a million Californians are still exposed to unsafe drinking water, and assistance for [low-income households is patchy and insufficient](#).

Emergency help is on its way.

The latest federal aid package included [\\$638m for states to help struggling households pay water bills](#), though emerging statewide debt data suggests this will barely make a dent in the problem. In Virginia, more than half a million households are behind on water bills, with [municipal utilities owed at least \\$88m](#) in arrears.

In his proposed budget, Newsom has allocated \$600 a month for low-income families struggling to pay rent and other expenses.

But emergency measures will not be enough. A growing number of state and federal [lawmakers](#) and [advocates](#) are pushing for well-funded structural reforms to ensure safe, clean and affordable water for every American.

“Access to water is a fundamental right of all Californians, regardless of their income level or economic status. Yet many people are being denied this essential service, in part because of rising water rates but also because the pandemic has left so many people unemployed,” said the Democratic state senator Bill Dodd.

Environmental justice campaigners are backing two new bills introduced by Dodd on Tuesday that would create an [income-based assistance program](#) long [recommended by the water board](#), [limit shutoffs](#) and offer bridge loans to small utilities.

Nelson added: “Even before the pandemic, we lived in a country divided between those that have safe and affordable water and those that don't. Access to safe and affordable water is more than a public health threat – it is a matter of basic racial justice. There can be no equitable recovery in a society that allows for mass water shutoffs.”

HEADLINE	01/20 Study: talking spreads virus like coughing
SOURCE	<a href="https://www.theguardian.com/world/2021/jan/20/talking-can-spread-covid-as-much-as-coughing-says-research">https://www.theguardian.com/world/2021/jan/20/talking-can-spread-covid-as-much-as-coughing-says-research</a>
GIST	<p>Speaking to a friend when infected with the coronavirus could be as dangerous as coughing near them thanks to lingering particles, research has suggested.</p> <p>Covid can be spread through a number of routes, including virus-containing droplets emitted when an infected person breaths, speaks or coughs – a factor experts said could help to explain why <a href="#">Covid seems to spread more easily in indoor settings</a>.</p> <p>While large droplets fall to the ground over short distances, tiny droplets known as aerosols can carry the virus over distances greater than two metres, and linger.</p> <p>Now experts have developed models to explore the risk posed by large droplets and aerosols, and explore ways to mitigate it. Their results suggest it takes just a couple of seconds for expelled particles to travel beyond two metres.</p> <p>“You need masks, you need distancing and you need good ventilation so these particles don’t build up in an indoor space and they are safely removed,” said Prof Pedro Magalhães de Oliveira, an expert in fluid mechanics at the <a href="#">University of Cambridge</a> and co-author of the study.</p> <p>Writing in the journal <a href="#">Proceedings of the Royal Society A</a>, de Oliveira and colleagues reported how they built models that take into account the size of droplets emitted from infected individuals when they speak or cough, as well as factors including the makeup of the droplets and the time it takes for them to settle.</p> <p>The team also looked at infection risk, taking into account the viral load of individuals with Covid, and the estimated dose required to cause an infection – the latter was based on studies of a different coronavirus.</p> <p>The team concluded it was unsafe to stand without a mask two metres away from an infected person who is talking or coughing, with both situations posing an infection risk.</p> <p>The team add that an hour after an infected person has spoken for 30 seconds the total aerosol left contains much more viral mass than after one cough – adding that in small spaces and without ventilation this might be enough to cause Covid.</p> <p>“Speaking is a very important issue that has to be considered because it produces much finer particles [than coughing] and these particles, or aerosol, can be suspended for over an hour in amounts that are sufficient to cause the disease,” said de Oliveira.</p> <p>But whether people would catch Covid, he said, depends upon how much of the aerosol they breath in – which is influenced by factors including whether masks are worn, whether the situation is indoors, levels of ventilation and the distance between the people involved.</p> <p>The team have used their work to develop <a href="#">an online calculator</a>, called Airborne.cam, for users to explore their risk of becoming infected indoors via airborne particles alone.</p> <p>According to the tool, spending one hour in a 250m<sup>2</sup> store – assumed to have a maximum capacity of 50 people and ventilation on a par with offices – results in an individual having around an 8% estimated chance of becoming infected with coronavirus, assuming there are five infected people in the store and no one is wearing a mask.</p>

	<p>If ventilation is improved so the air is renewed five times an hour rather than three times, this risk can be cut to under 2%; a similar drop can be gained if everyone wears three-ply face masks.</p> <p>While the infection risks are only theoretical estimates, and are not specific to the new UK coronavirus variant, the team said the tool can help users to explore ways to stay safe in different scenarios.</p> <p>“The idea is not to obtain absolute risk figures from the tool, but to use it to see how mitigation strategies impact risk of infection. It can be used to rank these strategies, for example,” said de Oliveira.</p> <p>Prof Catherine Noakes, a member of the Scientific Advisory Group for Emergencies and an expert in airborne infections at the University of Leeds, welcomed the study, but cautioned that the results are based on a number of assumptions.</p> <p>“It is likely that the results represent realistic worst-case scenarios as the model uses quite a high viral load as one of the assumptions, and this has a significant influence on the risk that is predicted,” she said, adding viral load varies between people and through the course of the disease.</p>
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HEADLINE	<b>01/19 Teacher shortages imperil reopen schools</b>
SOURCE	<a href="https://www.nytimes.com/2021/01/19/us/pandemic-substitute-teacher-shortages.html?action=click&amp;module=Top%20Stories&amp;pgtype=Homepage">https://www.nytimes.com/2021/01/19/us/pandemic-substitute-teacher-shortages.html?action=click&amp;module=Top%20Stories&amp;pgtype=Homepage</a>
GIST	<p>As exposure to the coronavirus forced thousands of teachers across the United States to stay home and quarantine this winter, administrators in the Washoe County School District, which serves 62,000 students in western Nevada, pulled out all the stops to try to continue in-person instruction for students.</p> <p>They exhausted the district’s regular supply of substitute instructors. They asked teachers to use their planning periods to cover classes for quarantining colleagues. Some schools tapped principals, librarians, guidance counselors and other staff members to teach classes or monitor lunch and recess. The superintendent even filled in for an absent teacher.</p> <p>“We had to embrace an all-hands-on-deck mind-set to keep schools open,” said Joe Ernst, an area superintendent who oversees 24 Washoe County schools.</p> <p>But by late November, the virus had forced so many teachers to stay home that the district was unable to cover some 2,000 requests for substitutes. Soon after, the district halted in-person instruction, shifting all middle and high schools to remote learning until this week.</p> <p>Washoe County’s struggles typify the battle that many schools are waging to continue in-person instruction. Across the country, state education and district officials say the pandemic has intensified a longstanding teacher shortage to crisis levels.</p> <p>As spikes in virus infections and exposures have forced more educators to stay home, the teacher shortage — exacerbated by limited access to Covid-19 testing and contact tracing — is among the main reasons that schools and even entire districts have had to shut down in-person instruction, often for weeks on end.</p> <p>“It’s just such a ripple effect,” said Laura Penman, the superintendent of Eminence Community Schools, a tiny district in rural Indiana. The district had to briefly close its only elementary school in November because a single infected educator had come into contact with multiple colleagues. There were not enough substitutes or staff members to fill in. “Teacher shortages can make a whole school go virtual,” she said.</p> <p>Desperate to stanch staffing shortfalls, districts large and small are increasing pay for substitutes and even <a href="#">advertising for temporary positions on local billboards</a>. Some states and districts have also suspended college course requirements, or permitted abbreviated online training, for emergency substitute teachers.</p>

Although stopgap staffing solutions may be necessary during the pandemic, education experts say they could diminish the quality of in-person learning, further disrupting education for a generation of children.

“Each day, these children are having a new teacher in front of them,” Mr. Ernst, the Washoe County area superintendent, said in a school board presentation this winter, echoing the concerns of educators and parents nationwide. “The overall continuity of education is substantially impacted.”

The U.S. public school system has been grappling with a shortage of regular, full-time teachers for years. There is reduced education funding in many states, and one study before the pandemic reported that schools nationwide needed [more than 100,000 additional full-time licensed teachers](#), particularly in science and special education. The coronavirus is vastly exacerbating that shortfall, experts say, by prompting many teachers to leave the profession or take early retirement.

The pandemic has also caused many retired educators who had regularly worked as substitutes to turn down the in-person teaching gigs.

“There’s a definite teacher shortage,” said Jeffrey Thoenes, the superintendent of Comstock Public Schools in Kalamazoo, Mich., noting that his district had recently logged about two dozen teacher absences in one day — far outstripping the three substitutes available to cover their classes.

Education researchers said the pandemic teaching shortage would likely intensify learning disparities, especially in high-poverty schools where experienced substitutes often choose not to work.

“It’s a disaster. Those kids who have already got the worst of Covid and its consequences are the ones who are going to face a larger lack of sufficient, and sufficiently qualified, teachers,” said Emma Garcia, an education economist at the Economic Policy Institute, a think tank in Washington. “It’s going to have negative consequences immediately and it’s going to take them longer to be able to catch up.”

Indeed, recent data from the Household Pulse Survey, an experimental effort from the U.S. Census Bureau to measure Americans’ experiences during the pandemic, suggests that the decreased availability of teachers — both in-person and online — may disproportionately affect low-income students.

In the two weeks before the December holiday break, for instance, 6.3 million survey respondents said children in their households had no live contact with their teachers in the preceding week. The impact was greatest in households earning \$25,000 or less, the lowest income bracket, where nearly 1.4 million respondents said there was no contact; fewer than 300,000 respondents in the highest income bracket, households earning \$200,000 or more, said the same.

As teacher availability decreases, many schools are seeking additional instructors both for in-person and virtual teaching positions. Kelly Education, an employment agency that provides temporary staff to school districts, said demand for long-term substitutes, who may take over an absent teacher’s classes for weeks or a semester, rose by 34 percent this school year.

To entice newcomers to try teaching during the pandemic, some districts are increasing pay or lowering the bar to entry by eliminating college course requirements for substitutes. Gwinnett County Public Schools in Georgia — one of the nation’s largest districts, with about 178,000 students — has tried both approaches. The district has been grappling with a decrease of more than 1,000 substitutes, amounting to a 30 percent drop.

After raising pay for short-term substitute teachers by \$5, to \$98 per day, proved insufficient to recruit enough fill-in teachers, the district lowered educational requirements for substitutes in December. Rather than needing 60 college credits, substitutes can now teach with a high school diploma. Monica Batiste, the district’s associate superintendent for human resources, said the rule change enabled the district to hire first- and second-year college students majoring in education.

Even so, the district's efforts were no match for the pandemic. With 460 teachers stuck at home in January because of possible coronavirus exposures, the district [has temporarily switched to remote learning](#) starting this week.

In a pandemic that has already derailed education for millions of schoolchildren, lowering the bar for substitutes can be a fraught exercise. In Nevada, education experts were torn after Gov. Steve Sisolak issued a pandemic regulation allowing large urban districts to hire emergency substitute teachers with only high school diplomas — an option previously available only to smaller rural districts.

“We have to go to these extremes to get adults temporarily in the room to support our children,” said Jhone Ebert, the superintendent of public instruction for the Nevada Department of Education, emphasizing that substitutes who take over classes for teachers on extended absences must still meet the college requirement. “This is not a long-term fix,” Dr. Ebert said.

Emily Ellison, the chief human resource officer for the Washoe County School District, said the new rules had already enabled the district to vet, hire and train about 60 new substitutes.

But some educators warned that even temporarily eliminating college credit requirements could diminish instructional quality. In [an opinion piece](#) last month in a local newspaper, Brian Rippet, the president of Nevada's largest teachers' union, described the waiver as an “Any Warm Body Will Do” regulation for substitute teachers.

While districts are intensifying their efforts to recruit temporary teachers, some current substitutes say they face precarious pandemic working conditions.

In the fall, [Brandon Summers, a violinist](#) in Las Vegas, began a semester-long substitute assignment as an orchestra teacher in the Clark County School District, the nation's fifth-largest school system. Although the students were learning remotely, the district initially required substitute teachers to come into school and teach virtually from classrooms.

Paid \$120 per day, Mr. Summers said he took on all of the duties of a regular licensed teacher without benefits like health insurance or paid sick days. He was also expected to quickly learn an array of online attendance and communications tools — all while teaching orchestra virtually to some 210 middle school students.

He is now part of a Las Vegas community group, [United Substitutes for Higher Wages and Better Benefits](#), that is pushing for improved working conditions for district substitutes.

“It was just chaos,” Mr. Summers said of his pandemic teaching experience, adding that the school's support team had no power to alleviate the increased teaching burdens for temporary instructors. “They were just happy to get another adult body in front of these kids.”

One potentially beneficial consequence of the teacher shortage crisis is that loosened substitute rules are enabling college students to gain hands-on classroom experience more quickly, potentially fast-tracking them into educational careers. This school year, education majors at Marshall University in Huntington, W.Va., began working as paid substitutes as part of their supervised student-teacher training.

In September, Allison LePort, then a senior at Marshall, began helping out in a kindergarten class in Mason County, W.Va. Ms. LePort, who graduated from college in December, then landed a long-term substitute assignment at the same school as a virtual teacher for fourth graders from four schools.

“Even with my student teaching experience, it's been overwhelming,” Ms. LePort said, adding that her initial anxiety quickly dissipated as she developed a rapport with her students. “I couldn't imagine not having an education background and going into it.”



	<p>The stopgap teaching measures that many school districts and states are rushing to adopt now could very well outlast the pandemic. And that, critics say, could end up permanently lowering the credentials for substitutes while failing to address the serious economic and professional issues underpinning longstanding teacher shortages.</p> <p>“What’s at stake here is teachers’ ability to give and kids’ ability to learn,” said Ms. Garcia, the education economist. “What we need to really do is undo those Band-Aids and put together a strong strategy for solving the issues.”</p> <p>The underlying causes of the teacher shortage, Ms. Garcia and others say, have long been clear: years of steep <a href="#">cuts in school funding</a>, <a href="#">low wages</a>, difficult working conditions and lack of respect.</p> <p>If the administration of President-elect Joseph R. Biden Jr. hopes to solve that crisis, some experts say, it can start by fulfilling his campaign promise to give educators “<a href="#">the pay and dignity they deserve</a>.”</p>
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HEADLINE	<b>01/19 Calif. surge receding; new variant threat</b>
SOURCE	<a href="https://www.nytimes.com/live/2021/01/19/world/covid-19-coronavirus#californias-nightmare-surge-may-be-receding-but-a-new-variant-and-a-jumbled-vaccine-rollout-could-threaten-progress">https://www.nytimes.com/live/2021/01/19/world/covid-19-coronavirus#californias-nightmare-surge-may-be-receding-but-a-new-variant-and-a-jumbled-vaccine-rollout-could-threaten-progress</a>
GIST	<p>California’s terrifying coronavirus surge, which has overwhelmed hospitals and killed thousands, appears to be subsiding, one of the state’s top health officials said on Tuesday.</p> <p>Covid-19 hospitalizations have decreased by 8.5 percent over the last two weeks, suggesting that a “surge on top of a surge” following the holidays hasn’t been as severe as was feared. The state’s overall transmission rate has decreased.</p> <p>“These are rays of hope shining through,” Dr. Mark Ghaly, California’s secretary for health and human services said in a virtual news conference.</p> <p>But even as the cresting case numbers and hospitalizations started to recede, another variant of the virus — separate from the one found in the United Kingdom — was found throughout the state.</p> <p>Although it is still unknown whether the variant is deadlier or more transmissible than other forms of the virus, it was found in more than half of samples researchers tested last week in Los Angeles, suggesting that it may be a driver of the region’s current crisis.</p> <p>At the same time, the state’s vaccine rollout has continued to be plagued by widespread confusion.</p> <p>After Gov. Gavin Newsom announced last week that the state would expand eligibility to anyone 65 and older, Californians who met the criteria scrambled to find appointments, quickly overwhelming county websites and jamming the phone lines of their health care providers.</p> <p>In an email to members on Tuesday in response to a crush of inquiries, Kaiser Permanente, one of the state’s biggest health care providers, said that it cares for 1.5 million people who are 65 and older. Last week, the system received “just 20,000 first doses” of the vaccine.</p> <p>“Our ability to expand and speed vaccine distribution depends on vaccine supply made available to our state,” the email said. “At the current rate, we’re looking at vaccine distribution that is much slower than any of us find acceptable.”</p> <p>Experts have said that much of the chaos so far is stemming from the fact that California is relying on already overwhelmed county public health departments to manage much of the distribution of vaccines.</p>



Each county has responded to the challenge differently, with evolving guidelines meant to address the tension between vaccinating as many people as quickly as possible and protecting the most vulnerable populations first.

In Los Angeles County, for example, officials at first said they planned to stick with strict priority rules, vaccinating thousands of health care workers first, before broadening eligibility.

But on Monday, Hilda Solis, chair of the powerful Los Angeles County Board of Supervisors, announced she was signing an executive order directing the county's department of public health to do just that: Make vaccination appointments available to anyone in the county 65 and older.

Ms. Solis said in an interview on Monday that it will be important in coming days and weeks to bring vaccines to clinics, pharmacies and schools in the county's hardest hit communities, which are lower-income, predominantly Latino and home to many essential workers.

But, she said, the most urgent priority now is getting vaccines out the door.

Meanwhile, some state lawmakers have asked the governor to develop a program aimed specifically at inoculating farmworkers, who have been some of the state's most critical — and at-risk — essential workers throughout the pandemic.

"Farmworkers are the fulcrum of the food chain, ravaged by Covid-19 with no available replacement labor pool," the letter said.

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HEADLINE	<b>01/19 Coronavirus death toll surpasses 400,000</b>
SOURCE	<a href="https://www.nytimes.com/live/2021/01/19/world/covid-19-coronavirus#coronavirus-deaths-usa-400000">https://www.nytimes.com/live/2021/01/19/world/covid-19-coronavirus#coronavirus-deaths-usa-400000</a>
GIST	<p>More than 400,000 people in the United States who had the coronavirus have died, according to data <a href="#">compiled by The New York Times</a> on Tuesday, as the anniversary of the country's first known death in the pandemic approaches.</p> <p>The pace at which Americans have been dying accelerated through the fall and into the winter, exploding to record levels in January. During some weeks this month, the average deaths per day exceeded 3,300, more than the number of people killed in the <a href="#">Sept. 11 terrorist attacks</a>. Tuesday's harrowing milestone came a day after the United States surpassed 24 million total cases.</p> <p>The single deadliest day of the pandemic so far was Jan. 12, when more than 4,400 deaths were reported. Unlike in the early days of the outbreak in the United States, which was centered in a handful of big, mostly Northeastern cities, this surge is widespread. As of Monday, Arizona, California, South Carolina, New York and Oklahoma had reported the most new cases per capita over the previous week. Much of the latest surge has been attributed to people gathering over the holidays, from Thanksgiving to New Year's Eve.</p> <p>The length of time it has taken to log each 100,000 deaths has decreased dramatically since the country's first known Covid-19 death, which occurred in Santa Clara County, Calif., on Feb. 6, 2020. The first 100,000 U.S. deaths were confirmed by May 27; it then took four months for the nation to log another 100,000 deaths; the next, about three months; the latest, <a href="#">just five weeks</a>.</p> <p>Public health experts do not expect mortality rates to peak until the end of the month. By the end of February, the death toll might hit 500,000, a number that would have seemed unthinkable a year ago. Dr. Anthony S. Fauci, the country's top infectious disease expert, estimated last March <a href="#">that up to 240,000 Americans might lose their lives</a>, an enormous figure that still fell far short of reality.</p>

The United States has had more total virus-related deaths than any other country in the world. In total, New York alone has recorded [more than 40,000 known deaths](#). In all, [more than two million people](#) have died with the virus [worldwide](#), a number that is almost certainly an undercount.

The blame for the enormous loss of American life, many experts say, lies in a failure of leadership by President Trump, whose administration politicized the use of masks and left states to implement a patchwork of inconsistent measures that did not bring the virus under control.

“It wasn’t that he was just inept,” said Jeffrey Shaman, a Columbia University professor of environmental health sciences who has modeled the virus’s spread. “He made something that could have very easily turned into a point of patriotism, pride and national unity — protecting your neighbors, protecting your loved ones, protecting your community — into a divisive issue, as is his wont, and it cost people’s lives.”

By comparison, Vietnam, a nation of 97 million people, has confirmed just 35 virus-related deaths, Dr. Shaman added.

President-elect Joseph R. Biden Jr., who is set to be inaugurated on Wednesday, has called for an aggressive national strategy to beat the virus, including [ramping up the availability of Covid-19 vaccines](#), though he has not committed to a federal mask mandate.

“You have my word that we will manage the hell out of this operation,” Mr. Biden said on Friday, noting [the disproportionate deadly outcomes of the virus for Black, Latino and Indigenous Americans](#). “Our administration will lead with science and scientists.”

With the virus rampaging everywhere for so many months, hospitals have been stretched. In rural areas, doctors have at times been unable to transfer gravely ill patients to larger medical centers for more sophisticated treatment.

As of Monday, the seven-day average of cases across the United States was 200,000 a day, though it has started to decline from recent weeks. [Hospitalizations](#) also have finally begun to level off and on Sunday reached their lowest level since Jan. 2. In the Midwest, hit by its worst surge in the fall, case numbers have fallen sharply in recent weeks, but that progress seems to be slowing.

However, [new variants of the virus](#), some of which make it more transmissible, could soon spread throughout and threaten to make infections rise again.

“There’s no clear end in sight anytime in the near future,” said Ira M. Longini Jr., a biostatistics professor at the University of Florida.

The variants have made it even more urgent to administer the coronavirus vaccines developed at record speed that brought so much hope to people when they started to become available last month.

But at the [slow rate that shots are being administered](#) — [about 10.6 million people had received at least the first dose](#) as of Friday — Dr. Shaman warned, it could take more months than expected to reach enough of [a critical mass of vaccinated people](#) for the inoculations to make a dent in the pandemic.

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HEADLINE	<b>01/19 New Calif. variant behind virus surge?</b>
SOURCE	<a href="https://www.nytimes.com/live/2021/01/19/world/covid-19-coronavirus#a-new-california-variant-may-be-driving-the-virus-surge-in-the-state-a-study-suggests">https://www.nytimes.com/live/2021/01/19/world/covid-19-coronavirus#a-new-california-variant-may-be-driving-the-virus-surge-in-the-state-a-study-suggests</a>
GIST	In late December, scientists in California began searching coronavirus samples for a fast-spreading new variant that had just been identified in Britain.

They found it, though in relatively few samples. In the process, the scientists made another unwelcome discovery: California had produced a variant of its own.

That mutant, which belongs to a lineage known as CAL.20C, seemed to have popped up in July but lay low till November. Then it began to quickly spread.

CAL.20C accounted for more than half of the virus genome samples collected in Los Angeles laboratories on Jan. 13, according to a new study that has not yet been published.

“We had our own problem that didn’t cross over from Europe,” said Jasmine Plummer, a research scientist at Cedars-Sinai Medical Center in Los Angeles, who worked on the new study. “It really originated here, and it had the chance to start to emerge and surge over the holiday.”

There’s no evidence that CAL.20C is more lethal than other variants. And scientists have to conduct more research to determine whether CAL.20C is in fact more contagious than other forms of the virus.

But Eric Vail, the director of molecular pathology at Cedars-Sinai, said it was possible that CAL.20C is playing a large part in the surge of cases that has overwhelmed Southern California’s hospitals. “I’m decently confident that this is a more infectious strain of the virus,” Dr. Vail said.

Dr. Charles Chiu, a virologist at the University of California, San Francisco, said that across the state, he and his colleagues are finding the variant in roughly 20 percent to 30 percent of samples being sequenced. “It just popped up under our noses, and now it’s rising in multiple counties,” he said. “On the whole, it’s safe to say it’s going to spread outside of California.”

Researchers are also looking in other states for CAL.20C, Dr. Plummer said, and have so far found it in Arizona, Connecticut, Maryland, New Mexico, Nevada, New York, Texas, Utah, Washington and Wyoming, as well as the District of Columbia. It’s not clear yet how common it is outside of California.

A spokesman for the Centers of Disease Control and Prevention said the agency is working with California to learn more about the new variant. “Currently, it’s not known whether this variant is any different from other SARS-CoV-2 viruses, whether those differences may have contributed to its emergence, or whether this emergence was merely a random event,” he said.

Outside scientists are concerned about the new findings, but say it’s still unclear whether the California variant’s mutations are giving it an edge — or whether it’s showing up so much just by chance.

There might be a bias in the samples that scientists are looking at, for example. It’s also possible that CAL.C20 happened to become more common thanks to some big super-spreader events.

Dr. Chiu and his colleagues are now growing the variant in cells to see how quickly they multiply compared with other variants. The researchers are also going to observe how well antibodies produced by vaccines work against CAL.C20.

Other scientists are also looking more closely at the rise in frequency of the variant in California. They’re searching for evidence that could determine whether biology or chance is to blame for its rise.

“That’s the work that needs to be done,” said Dr. Vail. “We just don’t have that information.”

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HEADLINE	01/19 College Board SAT simplifies process
SOURCE	<a href="https://www.nytimes.com/live/2021/01/19/world/covid-19-coronavirus#sat-test-essay-subject-matter">https://www.nytimes.com/live/2021/01/19/world/covid-19-coronavirus#sat-test-essay-subject-matter</a>

<p><b>GIST</b></p>	<p>The College Board, which administers the SAT college entrance examination and has seen its business battered by the coronavirus pandemic, said Tuesday that it will <a href="#">drop the optional essay section from the SAT</a> and stop administering subject-matter tests in the United States.</p> <p>“The pandemic accelerated a process already underway at the College Board to simplify our work and reduce demands on students,” the organization said in a statement, adding that it would also continue to develop a version of the SAT test that could be administered digitally — something it <a href="#">tried and failed to do quickly</a> with an at-home version last year after the pandemic shut down testing centers.</p> <p>The board gave no time frame for when a digital version of the SAT, which would be administered at testing centers by live proctors, might be introduced, but said it would provide more information in April.</p> <p>The changes to the SAT come as more and more colleges are <a href="#">dropping the requirement</a> that students take the test, as well as its competitor the ACT, a trend driven in part by <a href="#">concerns about equity</a> that received a boost during the pandemic.</p> <p>Critics of the College Board said the decision was almost certainly driven by financial considerations. The SAT has in the past represented a substantial portion of the College Board’s more than \$1 billion in annual revenue.</p> <p>“The SAT and the subject exams are dying products on their last breaths, and I’m sure the costs of administering them are substantial,” Jon Boeckenstedt, the vice provost of enrollment management at Oregon State University, said in an email.</p> <p>At the same, he said, the College Board was likely to try to use the elimination of the subject tests to try to convince elite high schools to offer more Advanced Placement courses, whose tests the College Board also administers, as a way to burnish their students’ transcripts. But because A.P. tests have to be taken at the end of a student’s junior year or earlier for their scores to be considered in admissions decisions, more focus on A.P. scores in the admissions process would likely only increase pressure on students.</p> <p>“Overall, it’s good for College Board, and probably not so good for students,” Mr. Boeckenstedt said. “In other words, par for the course.”</p> <p>Indeed, in its announcement, the board said that A.P. courses provided students “rich and varied opportunities to showcase their knowledge and skills” and that the “expanded reach of A.P. and its widespread availability for low-income students and students of color” made the subject tests no longer necessary.</p> <p>David Coleman, the chief executive officer of the College Board, said the organization’s goal was not to get more students to take A.P. courses and tests, but to eliminate redundant exams, thereby reducing the burden on high school students applying to college.</p> <p>“Anything that can reduce unnecessary anxiety and get out of the way is of huge value to us,” he said.</p>
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<p><b>HEADLINE</b></p>	<p><b>01/19 US: China ‘genocide’ against Uighurs</b></p>
<p><b>SOURCE</b></p>	<p><a href="https://www.nytimes.com/2021/01/19/us/politics/trump-china-xinjiang.html">https://www.nytimes.com/2021/01/19/us/politics/trump-china-xinjiang.html</a></p>
<p><b>GIST</b></p>	<p>WASHINGTON — The State Department declared on Tuesday that the Chinese government is committing genocide and crimes against humanity through its <a href="#">wide-scale repression of Uighurs and other predominantly Muslim ethnic minorities</a> in its northwestern region of Xinjiang, including in its use of internment camps and forced sterilization.</p> <p>The move is expected to be the Trump administration’s final action on China, made on its last full day, and is the <a href="#">culmination of a yearslong debate</a> over how to punish what many consider Beijing’s worst human</p>

rights abuses in decades. Relations between the countries have [deteriorated over the past four years](#), and the new finding adds to a [long list of tension points](#). Foreign policy officials and experts across the political spectrum in the United States say China will be the greatest challenge for any administration for years or decades to come.

“I believe this genocide is ongoing, and that we are witnessing the systematic attempt to destroy Uighurs by the Chinese party-state,” Secretary of State Mike Pompeo said [in a statement](#), adding that Chinese officials were “engaged in the forced assimilation and eventual erasure of a vulnerable ethnic and religious minority group.”

The determination of atrocities is a rare action on the part of the State Department and could lead the United States to impose more sanctions against China under the new Biden administration. President-elect Joseph R. Biden said last year through a spokesman that the policies by Beijing amounted to “genocide.”

Other nations or international institutions could follow suit in formally criticizing China over its treatment of its minority Muslims and taking punitive measures. The determination also prompts certain reviews within the State Department.

The finding is the harshest denunciation yet by any government against China’s policies in Xinjiang. Genocide is, according to [international convention](#), “intent to destroy, in whole or in part, a national, ethnical, racial or religious group.”

Mr. Pompeo, State Department lawyers and other officials had debated for months over the determination, but the matter had gained urgency in the Trump administration’s final days. As was common with most China policy, the issue of Xinjiang had long pitted administration officials against one another: Mr. Pompeo and other national security aides advocated tough measures against Beijing, while President Trump and top economic advisers brushed aside the concerns.

The Chinese government has rejected any accusations of genocide and other human rights violations in Xinjiang and often deploys the language of antiterrorism to defend its practices.

The Chinese Embassy in Washington on Tuesday night said in a long statement that “the so-called genocide in Xinjiang is simply a lie,” adding that the overall population of ethnic minorities in Xinjiang, as well as that of Uighurs, had grown from 2010 to 2018. In addition, it said, policies in Xinjiang are part of a fight against “terrorism and extremism,” and “these measures have proved to well service Xinjiang’s situation and produced notable results.”

To deflect criticism from U.S. officials, Chinese officials have also taken to underlining some of the Trump administration’s vast governance failures, including a [death toll of more than 400,000](#) from the coronavirus pandemic and the deadly [assault on the Capitol](#) by a mob incited by Mr. Trump.

Some Uighurs expressed gratitude for the decision. “Today’s determination of genocide is a signal of recognition to the long suffering of victims and survivors of the Chinese government’s internment camps, like my brother Ekpar, and millions of Uighurs,” said Rayhan Asat, a lawyer in Washington [whose younger brother is imprisoned in Xinjiang](#). “It is the starting point on the road to justice, freedom and accountability for these atrocities.”

Ziba Murat, a Virginia resident whose mother, [Gulshan Abbas](#), is imprisoned, said, “This gives us hope that those who have attempted to water down what is happening with the destruction of our people can no longer hide their complicity.”

Before the new condemnation from Washington, the strongest statement by a government entity declaring that China’s actions in Xinjiang amounted to genocide came from a Canadian parliamentary subcommittee. [Last October](#), the subcommittee [concluded](#) that the Chinese Communist Party was culpable of the crime.

Mr. Pompeo and senior State Department officials made the decision just days before Mr. Biden takes office. The finding could complicate his administration's dealings with Beijing, but it also offers a source of leverage. Mr. Biden's nominee for secretary of state, [Antony J. Blinken](#), said Tuesday at a Senate confirmation hearing that he agreed with the genocide determination and denounced the Xinjiang "concentration camps." He also asserted that China "poses the most significant challenge of any nation-state to the United States."

In the days before the decision, State Department officials had argued over whether China's actions in Xinjiang met the standard for genocide or whether they fell under crimes against humanity, which has a lower standard, said American officials familiar with the debate. Mr. Pompeo decided to use both. One American official said the best rationale for the genocide label was the use of forced sterilizations, birth control and family separations to destroy Uighur identity.

Several State Department officials said the decision was rooted in trying to meet policy goals; they said they hoped the move would spur other nations to take a harder public line against China on this and other issues.

Some officials opposed to the action pointed out that the department never made a determination on whether the Myanmar government had committed genocide [against the ethnic Rohingya](#) Muslims, despite strong evidence of the crime. In 2017, the department said Myanmar had committed "ethnic cleansing."

Mr. Biden, [a critic of China's human rights record](#) during his decades in office, has used forceful language to describe its repressive policies. In August, he released a [statement](#) calling China's actions "genocide" and pressed the president to do the same. Mr. Trump, he insisted, "must also apologize for condoning this horrifying treatment of Uighurs."

Mr. Biden was referring to an account by John R. Bolton, Mr. Trump's former national security adviser, who disclosed in his memoir that the president told Xi Jinping, the leader of China, at a summit in 2019 to [keep building internment camps](#) in Xinjiang, "which Trump thought was exactly the right thing to do." Mr. Bolton wrote that Mr. Trump had made similar remarks on a trip to China in 2017.

Mr. Bolton and other aides said Mr. Trump repeatedly [ignored their recommendations](#) to impose sanctions over Xinjiang to avoid jeopardizing trade negotiations with China. Mr. Trump has expressed little concern for human rights, and for most of his term publicly referred to Mr. Xi as a friend.

For years, Democratic and Republican members of Congress have urged the administration to take a more aggressive stand. An [annual report](#) released Thursday by the Congressional-Executive Commission on China said there was evidence that "crimes against humanity — and possibly genocide — are occurring" in Xinjiang. It stressed that budget legislation passed in December requires that the U.S. government determine within 90 days whether China had committed atrocities in the region.

Some lawmakers made a last-minute push for the Trump administration to issue a determination against China.

Senator Robert Menendez, Democrat of New Jersey and the incoming chairman of the Senate Foreign Relations Committee, said Tuesday that China had committed genocide, but stressed "this is an action that the Trump administration should have taken years ago, not as it is walking out the door — and not having given China a green light for its concentration camps, as Ambassador Bolton alleged."

In October 2019, the Trump administration [blacklisted police departments in Xinjiang and several Chinese companies](#). It has since [issued other sanctions](#), including against senior Communist Party officials. On Wednesday, it [announced a ban on imports](#) of products made with cotton and tomatoes from the area. The State Department's determination further underscores how Xinjiang has become a central human rights issue for the United States and its allies.



China has for decades exercised heavy-handed control over Xinjiang's ethnic minorities, who make up more than half of the region's population of 25 million. For the largest groups, their Islamic religion and Turkic language and culture set them apart from China's Han majority.

Tensions sharply worsened from 2009, when Uighurs taking part in [ethnic riots](#) killed about 200 Han in Urumqi, the regional capital, after [earlier tensions and violence](#). Chinese security forces began a sweeping crackdown. Attacks and more crackdowns occurred across Uighur towns in the years afterward, as well as in [some cities outside Xinjiang](#).

Since 2017, Xinjiang leaders pressed by Mr. Xi have begun or stepped up [policies intended to transform](#) the Uighurs, Kazakhs and other ethnic minorities into loyal, largely secular supporters of the Communist Party. The State Department determination said the Chinese government had committed "crimes against humanity" since "at least March 2017."

Security forces have sent hundreds of thousands of Uighurs and Kazakhs — possibly a million or more by some estimates — to indoctrination camps intended to instill loyalty to the party and break down adherence to Islam. The Chinese government has defended the camps as benign vocational training schools and disputed the estimates of inmate numbers, without ever giving its own. Former inmates and their families who have left China have described harsh living conditions, crude indoctrination and abusive guards.

The swelling camps drew growing international condemnation, including from human rights experts who advise the United Nations as well as the United States and other nations. Journalists and scholars [began writing articles](#) on the camps and a sophisticated high-tech surveillance system in Xinjiang in 2017, well before foreign governments started discussing the issue.

The indoctrination camps, however, have formed only part of the Chinese Communist Party's broader campaign to drastically transform Uighurs, Kazakhs and other ethnic minorities. Other measures include labor transfers, schooling and cultural policies, and population controls.

Under Mr. Xi, Xinjiang has expanded and intensified longstanding programs to shift Uighurs and Kazakhs from rural areas [to jobs in factories, cities and commercial farming](#). The Chinese government has said that these work transfers are entirely voluntary and bring prosperity to impoverished peoples. But some programs have set targets for the numbers of people relocated for work and restricted recruits from choosing or leaving their jobs — hallmarks of forced labor.

Schools have largely discarded classes in Uighur, pressing students to learn in Chinese. Uighur academics who have sought to preserve and promote their culture have been arrested, and Uighur-language publishing has been heavily curtailed. Officials have [forced children into boarding schools](#), separated from their parents.

Programs in Xinjiang have also sought to stem the growth of the Uighur population by forcing women to undergo permanent sterilization or have birth-control devices inserted, Adrian Zenz, a researcher in the United States who has focused on Xinjiang, [said in a report](#) last year. Chinese researchers have challenged the numbers and conclusions in Mr. Zenz's report [while not disputing](#) that the government wants to bring down the population growth of Uighurs.

The Chinese Embassy in Washington said on Twitter this month that Uighur women had been "emancipated" and were "no longer baby-making machines." Twitter later removed the comment and [told a reporter](#) that the post had violated rules against "dehumanization."

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HEADLINE 01/19 Dire shortage convalescent plasma

SOURCE <https://www.cbsnews.com/news/covid-convalescent-plasma-shortage/>



GIST	<p>As COVID-19 cases surge across the country, the American Red Cross <a href="#">warns</a> that one treatment that could help the sickest patients is now in short supply: convalescent plasma.</p> <p>Authorized by the Food and Drug Administration for emergency use in coronavirus patients back in <a href="#">August 2020</a>, convalescent plasma is antibody-rich blood plasma, collected from donors who have recovered from COVID-19, that is given, via a blood transfusion, to infected patients struggling to fight the virus.</p> <p>"We just simply can't keep up," Dr. Pampee Young, chief medical officer at the American Red Cross, told correspondent Elise Preston at CBS affiliate KRQE in Albuquerque, New Mexico. "We need as many of our recovered COVID-19 patients as possible to roll up their sleeves and come in and donate," Young said.</p> <p>Early trials of the experimental treatment indicated a 35% better chance of survival when convalescent plasma was used in "optimal patients" — which studies indicate are patients in the early stages of infection, before the virus invades the tissue and causes <a href="#">cell damage</a>.</p> <p>While medical experts warn against portrayals of convalescent plasma as a <a href="#">magic bullet</a>, researchers are finding areas of hope in their ongoing studies of the treatment. A recent <a href="#">study</a> published in the New England Journal of Medicine found that corrective plasma reduced the progression of COVID-19 in older adults "when given within 72 hours after the onset of mild Covid-19 symptoms."</p> <p>"This is a disease that has, still, very few therapeutics. We're seeing very new studies come out that suggest that the earlier you give it, the better it is," Young said.</p> <p>Amanda Solt, a front-line worker who contracted COVID-19 last year and is now recovered, is a strong believer in convalescent plasma. Last summer, Solt, an urgent care nurse in Georgia, found herself hospitalized with COVID-19 and struggling to breathe. "I've heard patients talk about it, but I never experienced it 'til that moment. You have a very overwhelming sense of doom," she said.</p> <p>Solt, a grandmother whose condition was rapidly declining when she received convalescent plasma, recovered after receiving treatment and is now back to work, according to KRQU. She recently donated plasma herself, expressing deep gratitude for the nurses and plasma donors who contributed to her own recovery from the virus.</p> <p>"How do you say thank you to that?" Solt told KRQU. "I could never, ever tell them thank you enough for giving me a second chance on life."</p> <p>Information on how and where to donate plasma is available <a href="#">60 Minutes Overtime</a>. Even those who don't have COVID-19 antibodies can still help: The American Red Cross says the need for standard blood and platelet donations is constant, especially during this pandemic.</p>
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HEADLINE	<b>01/19 Many healthcare workers refuse vaccine</b>
SOURCE	<a href="https://www.cbsnews.com/news/covid-vaccine-health-care-worker-reluctance/">https://www.cbsnews.com/news/covid-vaccine-health-care-worker-reluctance/</a>
GIST	<p>As many Americans scramble to arrange appointments for their first doses of the <a href="#">COVID-19</a> vaccine, some health care workers are declining to be inoculated.</p> <p>A significant percentage of doctors, nurses, EMS workers, support staff and other health care employees said they turned down the Pfizer-BioNTech and Moderna vaccines over concerns they may not be safe or effective, according to a recent <a href="#">survey</a> by Surgo Ventures, a non-profit group focused on solving health and social problems. Others in the health field worried the development of the vaccine had been rushed.</p> <p>"We have a lot more work to do to get health care workers to take the vaccine. Simply making it available is not enough — we have to take a more precise, targeted approach to reach different segments of</p>

population to overcome hesitancy," Hannah Kemp, director of programs for Surgo Ventures, told CBS MoneyWatch.

That hesitancy can be surprisingly stubborn to overcome. Surgo polled more than 2,500 U.S. health care workers to assess their comfort in getting vaccinated. At the time of the survey, administered from December 17 to 30, 53% of respondents had been offered the vaccine. Of those workers, 15%, or almost 200 people polled, said they had refused to take the vaccine, with many claiming there is insufficient evidence the treatments are effective, despite assurances otherwise by federal and state health agencies and major pharmaceutical companies.

Another 24% cited personal safety concerns, while 16% said they thought the approval process was too rushed.

With the death toll from [COVID-19 approaching 400,000](#), the findings underline a key challenge as the incoming Biden administration and states around the country try to accelerate what has been a [bumpy initial rollout of the vaccines](#).

"If health care workers are hesitant and we need to take specific efforts to overcome that, we are going to have a huge challenge in convincing the general population to take the vaccine in the U.S.," Kemp said.

### **"So much is unknown"**

Jessica Outten, a nurse practitioner specializing in pediatric neurosurgery at Children's Hospital Colorado in Denver, is one health care worker who is opting against getting vaccinated for now, saying that people who are more vulnerable to COVID-19 should have priority.

"It's our choice, and at this time I am going to let other people who are immunocompromised, elderly and who really want it go first," Outten, 38, told CBS MoneyWatch.

But Outten also admits being in no hurry to get her shots because of concerns about the safety of the vaccine, expressing confidence that her diligent use of personal protective equipment will keep her safe. The Food and Drug Administration authorized both the Pfizer-BioNTech and Moderna vaccines for emergency use in under a year. Developing vaccines typically takes a decade.

"So much is unknown about the vaccine's long-term effects and with the virus, and I'm pretty conservative. I make sure all my ducks are in a row before I do anything — I'm not very adventurous," she said, noting that some of her co-workers have had modestly more severe reactions to their initial dose.

### **A legacy of racism in health care**

Black health care workers refused the vaccines at a significantly higher rate than average, Surgo's survey found: 35% turned down the opportunity to get their first dose. That compared with 12% to 14% for other racial groups. Women and Republicans were also less likely to accept the vaccine, according to the survey.

Researchers weren't surprised to find higher resistance among Black employees in health care, pointing to a historic distrust of the medical community by many African Americans. Such attitudes, while not universal, are rooted in past abuses including [experimental operations](#) on enslaved Black women in the 1840s as well as the infamous [Tuskegee Institute experiments](#) in the 1930s that examined the progression of syphilis in Black men.

"In the African American community, the Tuskegee experiment still resonates to this day," said Dr. Emmanuel Pehrah, an assistant professor of global health at New York University.

Workers in health care support roles who deal with patients, such as phlebotomists who draw blood for tests, were also more hesitant to take the vaccine.

"Among some health care workers there is low understanding overall of how vaccines work, so it would be beneficial to couple conversations explaining the COVID-19 vaccine with overall conversations about how vaccines work in general," Kemp said.

Some facilities, including Houston Methodist, a leading hospital in Texas, [is offering its 26,000 workers a \\$500 bonus](#) if they take the vaccine, to persuade those who may be reluctant to sign up.

Other organizations aren't giving individuals a choice. Trinitas School of Nursing in New Jersey [is ordering students](#) in its program to get the COVID-19 vaccine or else withdraw, according to CBS New York.

### Leading from the front

Another worrisome finding: Aides and other workers at long-term care facilities including nursing homes — where more than 100,000 residents and staff are believed [to have died of COVID-19](#) — said they were less likely to get the vaccine than hospital workers, according to the survey.

Forty-one percent of workers in these types of facilities believed only "some" or "a few" of their colleagues would get the vaccine, compared to 25% of hospital workers, Surgo found. Such numbers jibe with other reports indicating reluctance among long-term care workers. Roughly [60% of workers](#) in Ohio nursing homes chose not to get vaccinated, according to state data released in December.

Kemp suggested that leaders in nursing homes, assisted living centers and other eldercare facilities could set an example by getting vaccinated and sharing their experiences.

That was the approach embraced by Rev. Dr. Derrick DeWitt, director and chief financial officer of the Maryland Baptist Aged Home in Baltimore, Maryland. Some of his staffers and residents didn't know much about the COVID-19 vaccine, so he got the shots to reassure them it was safe, he told CBS MoneyWatch.

"It was really challenging getting people to take the vaccine, but I took it first to try to encourage people to do it, and I assured them I had no residual effects from taking the vaccine," he said. "More people came around after that."

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HEADLINE	01/19 Youth protests sweeping Tunisia
SOURCE	<a href="https://abcnews.go.com/Health/wireStory/ap-explainer-youth-protests-sweeping-tunisia-75344292">https://abcnews.go.com/Health/wireStory/ap-explainer-youth-protests-sweeping-tunisia-75344292</a>
GIST	<p>TUNIS, Tunisia -- A growing groundswell of youth unrest, tapping into a well of economic frustration, is sweeping Tunisia and worrying its leadership all the way to the top. It is, after all, the country that triggered the 2011 Arab Spring revolutions.</p> <p>A third of the North African nation's young people are unemployed — and many are angry about their stagnant fortunes. For the fourth consecutive day, they have taken to the streets in violent demonstrations across the country of 11.7 million -- from the capital of Tunis, to the cities of Kasserine, Gafsa, Sousse and Monastir.</p> <p>The protests have led to a muscular response from authorities who fear a repeat of the protests that led to the ousting of strongman President Zine al-Abidine Ben Ali 10 years ago. The army has been deployed in four hot spots. Here's a look at what is going on:</p> <p><b>TUNISIA'S PROTEST MOVEMENT IS GROWING</b></p> <p>Since Friday, protest groups that are growing in size by the day have been out in force every night. They are staging simultaneous, often-violent demonstrations in cities around Tunisia.</p>

The groups have been pelting municipal buildings with stones, throwing Molotov cocktails, looting, vandalizing and clashing with police. The unrest is concentrated in poor, densely populated districts where trust with law enforcement is already lacking.

The army was called in by the government on Sunday night to quell tensions and protect the country's institutions. Police said many hundreds of protesters have been arrested.

#### WHAT ARE THEY PROTESTING?

The precise causes are unclear, but the dire economic outlook of the stagnant North African country is at the heart of the dissatisfaction.

Carrying placards such as "Employment is a right, not a favor," the protesters are angry over the broken promises of democratically elected President Kaïs Saïed and his government, which hasn't been able to turn around an economy on the verge of bankruptcy.

Ten years after the history-making revolution, whose slogan was "employment, freedom and dignity," Tunisians feel they have anything but that. A third of Tunisia's youth are unemployed and a fifth of the country lives under the poverty line, according to the National Institute of Statistics.

Young people don't remember the repression under Ben Ali, and want job opportunities. They're communicating this common frustration via social media, like in neighboring Algeria, where a youth-led protest movement forced its longtime leader out of power in 2019.

#### WHY HAS THE PANDEMIC MADE THINGS WORSE?

The country's disparate lockdown restrictions and a nightly curfew since October to contain the spread of COVID-19 has exacerbated tensions.

The pandemic has especially hurt Tunisia's key tourism sector, once powered by its beautiful historic cities and white sandy beaches.

Flights have been grounded and potential tourists face lockdowns at home and a general reluctance to travel when contagious virus variants are racing through nations and continents.

#### HOW ARE AUTHORITIES RESPONDING?

Amnesty International has implored Tunisian authorities to use restraint in calming tensions and uphold the rights of the many hundreds who have been detained, but authorities have been increasingly reliant on the army for help and have used tear gas against protesters.

The Interior Ministry has justified the robust police response as necessary "to protect the physical integrity of citizens and public and private goods."

Others disagree. The president of the Tunisian Forum for Economic and Social Rights, Abderrahman Lahdhili, said this approach "is not the most appropriate," and authorities should instead be looking at the underlying "deep reasons." Each year, Lahdhili said, 100,000 students drop out of school and 12,000 of them turn to illegal migration, taking to overcrowded smugglers' boats in a risky attempt to reach Europe. Others, he said, fall prey to being recruited by extremist organizations.

#### ARE ISLAMIST FORCES BEHIND THE PROTESTS?

Saïed, the conservative president, tried to speak directly to the protesters by making an unexpected visit on Monday evening to see them in popular district of M'nihla, near Tunis.

	<p>He warned the protesters against extremist Islamist forces “acting in the shadows” who he claimed are trying to ferment chaos and destabilize the democratically elected government.</p> <p>It’s unclear if this is simply a way to shift blame away from his government for the unrest, or if Islamist forces are really behind the movement. Saied himself is an outsider who won with support from moderate Islamists.</p> <p>The leader of Tunisia’s influential Islamist-inspired Ennahda party, Rached Ghannouchi, has condemned the recent “acts of looting and vandalism.”</p>
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HEADLINE	<b>01/19 UN warns: 350M in Asia hungry</b>
SOURCE	<a href="https://abcnews.go.com/Health/wireStory/pandemic-surging-food-prices-leave-asia-hungry-75362178">https://abcnews.go.com/Health/wireStory/pandemic-surging-food-prices-leave-asia-hungry-75362178</a>
GIST	<p>United Nations agencies are warning that more than 350 million people in the Asia-Pacific region are going hungry as the coronavirus pandemic destroys jobs and pushes food prices higher.</p> <p>The report issued Wednesday by four agencies says the pandemic is making it difficult for 1.9 billion people to afford healthy diets. It follows an earlier report that forecast that in a worst case scenario that 828 million people might suffer from acute hunger because of the crisis.</p> <p>The latest estimate is that nearly 688 million people globally are undernourished, more than half of them in Asia. The largest share is in South Asian countries like Afghanistan, where four in 10 people are malnourished.</p> <p>The report is mostly based on data up to 2019, before the pandemic struck. But it also estimates that an additional 140 million people were likely to have fallen into extreme poverty in 2020 due to the impact of virus outbreaks and lockdowns. By the end of last year, some 265 million were estimated to be facing acute food insecurity.</p> <p>A key factor is food affordability, a problem in wealthy nations like Japan as well as impoverished places like East Timor and Papua New Guinea, said the report issued by the U.N. Food and Agriculture Organization, UNICEF, the World Food Program and the World Health Organization.</p> <p>Disruptions and job losses due to the pandemic are preventing families from getting enough to eat in many places. That's evident in the long lines seen at food banks even in the United States.</p> <p>In India, broken supply chains and transport problems, especially during pandemic lockdowns, have prevented surplus grain stocks from reaching all those in need. Day laborers and migrants are the most vulnerable, despite a massive public distribution system that entitles 75% of the rural population and half of those living in cities to subsidized food grains.</p> <p>Since eligibility for such programs is based on a census that is nearly a decade old, many urban poor and migrants cannot tap those resources.</p> <p>Across Asia, high prices for fruits, vegetables and dairy products have made it “nearly impossible” for low income families to have healthy diets, the report said. FAO data show food prices rose to their highest level in nearly six years in November.</p> <p>Many in the region instead end up consuming high-calorie, cheap processed foods that contribute to problems with obesity and diabetes but lack vitamins and minerals.</p> <p>Data in the report show that it is more expensive to eat a healthy diet in Thailand, Laos, Bhutan and Indonesia, at about \$5 per day, than it is in New Zealand and Australia, at less than \$3 per day.</p>

	<p>A nutritionally adequate diet tends to cost \$2 to \$3 per day in most countries, rich or poor, but is more expensive in Japan and South Korea. In most countries, the cost of a nutritious diet is two to three times that for a one just sufficient to provide enough energy.</p> <p>The cost of long-term deprivation is seen in higher rates of death and illness. Tens of millions of children suffer from wasting or stunting, failing to grow well and unable to achieve their full potential.</p> <p>The report said that five of the 45 countries requiring food assistance were in South, Southeast or East Asia. They include Bangladesh, Afghanistan, Pakistan, North Korea and Myanmar.</p> <p>Over the longer term, food insecurity had been improving before the pandemic hit. The report urged governments to transform food systems to ensure all are able to have nutritious diets. It called for a multidimensional approach ensuring better health care, water and sanitation, education and social protections.</p>
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HEADLINE	<b>01/19 Ontario asks US for 1M vaccine doses</b>
SOURCE	<a href="https://abcnews.go.com/International/wireStory/ontario-asks-biden-million-vaccines-amid-shortage-75347836">https://abcnews.go.com/International/wireStory/ontario-asks-biden-million-vaccines-amid-shortage-75347836</a>
GIST	<p>TORONTO -- Canada won't be getting any Pfizer-BioNTech <a href="#">coronavirus vaccines</a> next week and 50% fewer than expected over the next month, officials said Tuesday, prompting the leader of Canada's most populous province to ask U.S. President-elect Joe Biden to share a million doses from Pfizer's Michigan plant.</p> <p>Maj. Gen. Dany Fortin, who is leading Canada's logistical rollout and distribution of <a href="#">vaccines</a>, called it a major reduction, but said Pfizer is still expected to meet its contractual obligation to ship four million doses to Canada by the end of March.</p> <p>U.S. pharmaceutical company Pfizer confirmed last week it would temporarily reduce deliveries to Europe and Canada of its COVID-19 vaccine while it upgrades production capacity at its plant in Puurs, Belgium. Pfizer's Belgian plant supplies all shots delivered outside the U.S. Fortin said other countries have been impacted this week and that Canada will be impacted next week.</p> <p>"Pfizer assured me and Canada of equitable treatment," Procurement Minister Anita Anand said.</p> <p>Canadian Prime Minister Justin Trudeau said when he spoke to German Chancellor Angela Merkel this week, she told him that media have been asking her why Germany isn't doing as well as Canada on vaccines.</p> <p>Doug Ford, the premier of Ontario, Canada's most populous province, said he's angry. He asked Biden to help Canada out, noting there's a Pfizer plant in Michigan.</p> <p>"Our American friends, help us out," Ford said. "You have a new president, no more excuses. Help us out."</p> <p>Ford notes Ontario is a large trading partner to the U.S.</p> <p>"I can't help but ask the president," Ford said. "The least thing you can do ... give us a million vaccines. You have a hundred million down there. Give your great neighbor which stands shoulder to shoulder with you a million vaccines to get us over the hump. That's what we would love to see from the president."</p> <p>A mass vaccination clinic in Toronto, Canada's largest city, temporarily closed due to the shortage.</p>

## Cyber Awareness

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HEADLINE	01/19 Sawant: threats from Seattle FD email
SOURCE	<a href="https://komonews.com/news/local/councilmember-sawant-says-shes-gotten-threats-from-seattle-fire-department-email-address">https://komonews.com/news/local/councilmember-sawant-says-shes-gotten-threats-from-seattle-fire-department-email-address</a>
GIST	<p>SEATTLE — An investigation is underway after a Seattle councilmember said she received multiple threats in her official email account.</p> <p>Councilmember Kshama Sawant said the threats appear to come from a Seattle Fire Department email address.</p> <p>Sawant does not think it's a coincidence a threatening email landed in her official inbox—just two days before President-Elect Joe Biden's Inauguration Day.</p> <p>It read, "The time is here, and you will not have a place after tomorrow council woman. Announce your resignation now, or else."</p> <p>In another email from Dec. 17, 2020—the sender says: "If you need help leaving, try jumping head first off the top floor of your building. I'll even come push you."</p> <p>Sawant said they're from a series of ominous emails from a Seattle Fire Department employee email address—starting last December.</p> <p>The Seattle Fire Department said they launched an internal investigation as soon as they found out about the threatening emails from a department address, saying "We immediately alerted SPD as the city takes all threats very seriously. "</p> <p>"I think this is a really important example of how the far right is infuriated against social movements," Sawant said.</p> <p>"These threats while they are on the face of it directed towards me as an individual, elected representative, but they're really a threat against an entire movement—the Black Lives Matter movement— so it's crucial we take this seriously."</p>
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HEADLINE	01/19 Bugs in multiple video conferencing apps
SOURCE	<a href="https://www.bleepingcomputer.com/news/security/bugs-in-signal-facebook-google-chat-apps-let-attackers-spy-on-users/">https://www.bleepingcomputer.com/news/security/bugs-in-signal-facebook-google-chat-apps-let-attackers-spy-on-users/</a>
GIST	<p>Vulnerabilities found in multiple video conferencing mobile applications allowed attackers to listen to users' surroundings without permission before the person on the other end picked up the calls.</p> <p>The logic bugs were found by Google Project Zero security researcher Natalie Silvanovich in the Signal, Google Duo, Facebook Messenger, JioChat, and Mocha messaging apps and are now all fixed.</p> <p>However, before being patched, they made it possible to force targeted devices to transmit audio to the attackers' devices without the need of gaining code execution.</p> <p>"I investigated the signalling state machines of seven video conferencing applications and found five vulnerabilities that could allow a caller device to force a callee device to transmit audio or video data," Silvanovich explained.</p>



"Theoretically, ensuring callee consent before audio or video transmission should be a fairly simple matter of waiting until the user accepts the call before adding any tracks to the peer connection.

"However, when I looked at real applications they enabled transmission in many different ways. Most of these led to vulnerabilities that allowed calls to be connected without interaction from the callee."

As Silvanovich revealed, a [Signal bug](#) patched in September 2019 made it possible to connect the audio call by sending the connect message from the caller devices to the callee one instead of the other way around, without user interaction.

The [Google Duo bug](#), a race condition that allowed callees to leak video packets from unanswered calls to the caller, was fixed in December 2020, while the [Facebook Messenger flaw](#) (previously covered by BleepingComputer [here](#)) which allowed audio calls to connect before the call was answered was addressed in November 2020.

Two similar vulnerabilities were discovered in the JioChat and Mocha messengers in July 2020, bugs that allowed [sending JioChat audio](#) (fixed in July 2020) and to [send Mocha audio and video](#) (fixed in August 2020) after exploitation, without user consent.

Silvanovich also looked for similar bugs in other video conferencing apps, including Telegram and Viber, but didn't find any such issues.

"The majority of calling state machines I investigated had logic vulnerabilities that allowed audio or video content to be transmitted from the callee to the caller without the callee's consent," Silvanovich [added](#).

"It is also concerning to note that I did not look at any group calling features of these applications, and all the vulnerabilities reported were found in peer-to-peer calls. This is an area for future work that could reveal additional problems."

Silvanovich also found a [critical vulnerability in the WhatsApp mobile messaging app](#) that could have been activated simply by a user answering a call to crash or fully compromise the app.

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HEADLINE	01/19 Malwarebytes confirms email breach
SOURCE	<a href="https://www.bleepingcomputer.com/news/security/malwarebytes-says-solarwinds-hackers-accessed-its-internal-emails/">https://www.bleepingcomputer.com/news/security/malwarebytes-says-solarwinds-hackers-accessed-its-internal-emails/</a>
GIST	<p>Cybersecurity firm Malwarebytes today confirmed that the threat actor behind the SolarWinds supply-chain attack were able to gain access to some company emails.</p> <p>"While Malwarebytes does not use SolarWinds, we, like many other companies were recently targeted by the same threat actor," Malwarebytes CEO and co-founder Marcin Kleczynski <a href="#">said</a>.</p> <p>"We can confirm the existence of another intrusion vector that works by abusing applications with privileged access to Microsoft Office 365 and Azure environments.</p> <p>"After an extensive investigation, we determined the attacker only gained access to a limited subset of internal company emails."</p> <p>However, Kleczynski also added that the company did not find evidence of a compromise or unauthorized access to internal production or on-premises environments.</p> <p>The threat actor behind the SolarWinds hack is tracked as <a href="#">StellarParticle</a> (CrowdStrike), <a href="#">UNC2452</a> (FireEye), and <a href="#">Dark Halo</a> (Volexity), and is <a href="#">likely a Russian-</a></p>

[backed Advanced Persistent Threat \(APT\) group](#) according to a joint statement issued by the FBI, CISA, ODNI, and the NSA earlier this month.

#### **Malwarebytes software is safe to use**

Malwarebytes discovered that the threat actor that coordinated the SolarWinds hack used applications with privileged access infiltrate the company's Microsoft Office 365 and Azure environments.

"We received information from the Microsoft Security Response Center on December 15 about suspicious activity from a third-party application in our Microsoft Office 365 tenant consistent with the tactics, techniques and procedures (TTPs) of the same advanced threat actor involved in the SolarWinds attacks," Kleczynski added.

"The investigation indicates the attackers exploited an Azure Active Directory weakness that allowed access to a limited subset of internal company emails."

Malwarebytes software is safe to use given that a thorough analysis of "all Malwarebytes source code, build and delivery processes," did not reveal any signs of unauthorized access or compromise.

#### **Emails accessed via the Microsoft Graph service**

The SolarWinds hackers also targeted Malwarebytes administrative and service credentials by adding a self-signed certificate with credentials to the Microsoft Graph service principal account.

This later allowed them to "authenticate using the key and make API calls to request emails via MSGraph."

Malwarebytes is the fourth cybersecurity firm to confirm that its systems were targeted by the threat actor that orchestrated the [SolarWinds supply-chain attack](#) after [Microsoft](#), [FireEye](#), and [CrowdStrike](#).

"While we have learned a lot of information in a relatively short period of time, there is much more yet to be discovered about this long and active campaign that has impacted so many high-profile targets," Kleczynski said.

"It is imperative that security companies continue to share information that can help the greater industry in times like these, particularly with such new and complex attacks often associated with nation state actors."

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HEADLINE	<b>01/19 New FreakOut botnet hits Linux systems</b>
SOURCE	<a href="https://www.zdnet.com/article/new-freakout-botnet-targets-linux-systems-running-unpatched-software/?&amp;web_view=true">https://www.zdnet.com/article/new-freakout-botnet-targets-linux-systems-running-unpatched-software/?&amp;web_view=true</a>
GIST	<p>A newly identified botnet is targeting unpatched applications running on top of Linux systems, Check Point security researchers said in a report today.</p> <p>First seen in November 2020, the <b>FreakOut</b> botnet has surfaced again in a new series of attacks this month.</p> <p>Its current targets include TerraMaster data storage units, web applications built on top of the Zend PHP Framework, and websites running the Liferay Portal content management system.</p> <p>Check Point says the FreakOut operator is mass-scanning the internet for these applications and then utilizing exploits for three vulnerabilities in order to gain control of the underlying Linux system.</p> <p>All three vulnerabilities (listed below) are fairly recent, which means there's a high chance that FreakOut exploitation attempts are succeeding as many systems could still be lagging behind on their patches.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• <a href="#">CVE-2020-28188</a> - RCE in TerraMaster management panel (disclosed on December 24, 2020)</li></ul>

- [CVE-2021-3007](#) - deserialization bug in the Zend Framework (disclosed on January 3, 2021)
- [CVE-2020-7961](#) - deserialization bug in the Liferay Portal (disclosed on March 20, 2020)

Once the FreakOut bot gains access to a system, it's immediate step is to download and run a Python script that connects the infected devices to a remote IRC channel where the attacker can send commands and orchestrate a varied list of attacks using the enslaved devices.

According to a [Check Point technical report](#) published today, the list of commands that FreakOut bots can run includes the likes of:

- Gathering info on the infected system;
- Creating and sending UDP and TCP packets;
- Executing Telnet brute-force attacks using a list of hardcoded credentials;
- Running a port scan;
- Executing an ARP poisoning attack on the device's local network;
- Opening a reverse shell on the infected host;
- Killing local processes; and more.

Check Point argues that these functions can be combined to perform various operations, like launching DDoS attacks, installing cryptocurrency miners, turning infected bots into a proxy network, or launching attacks on the internal network of an infected device.

However, right now, Check Point says the botnet appears to be in its infancy. Researchers said they were able to reverse engineer the malware and then access the IRC channel through which the operator controlled the entire botnet.

Stats shown in the IRC panel suggest the botnet is only controlling around 180 infected systems, but past figures showed it merely peaked at around 300.

Both are low numbers for a botnet but more than enough to launch very capable DDoS attacks.

Furthermore, Check Point said it also found several clues in the malware's code that allowed it tracked down its creator, a person who goes online by the nickname of Freak.

Some clever sleuthing later, researchers said they were able to link this nickname to an older hacker acronym of FI0urite, which was the creator of the now-defunct N3Cr0m0rPh, a similar botnet malware strain that was sold on hacking forums and targeted Windows devices.

According to a screenshot of past N3Cr0m0rPh ads, many of the older botnet's features are identical to the ones found in the current FreakOut malware targeting Linux systems.

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HEADLINE	<b>01/19 AnyVan Europe online marketplace breach</b>
SOURCE	<a href="https://www.theregister.com/2021/01/19/anyvan_confirms_digital_breakin_says/?&amp;web_view=true">https://www.theregister.com/2021/01/19/anyvan_confirms_digital_breakin_says/?&amp;web_view=true</a>
GIST	<p>Anyvan, the European online marketplace that lets users buy delivery, transport or removal services from a network of providers, has confirmed it was the victim of a digital burglary that involved the theft of customers' personal data.</p> <p>The company wrote to customers mid-last week to inform them of a "breach of security resulting in the unauthorised access to data from our user database," according to the email seen by <i>The Register</i>.</p> <p>"This leaking of data came to our attention on the 31st December but we understand the incident itself occurred at the end of September. As soon as the incident came to our attention, our specialist IT team investigated it and have since taken the following remedial action: all passwords have been changed."</p>

The data in question? "Customers' names, email and a cryptographic hash of their password were accessed and 'potentially viewed' but no other personal data was unwittingly shared. A probe of events continues," said Anyvan.

As well as being "very sorry for the inconvenience," the company advised customers who used a password to access their account from April last year to update it immediately and in line with good hygiene to "regularly change your password to accounts that hold your personal data."

Besides changing the passwords, it didn't mention how it would avoid the same incident from re-occurring. It is not known whether the password hashes were salted. Salting is normally done to prevent hash collision attacks - where an attacker tries to find two input strings of a hash function to produce the same result.

*El Reg* sent a list of questions to AnyVan last week about the compromise of its internal systems, asking how entry was gained; how it has since been secured; whether the password hashes had been salted; and whether customers in mainland Europe had been impacted or just those in the UK. We also asked if it had informed the ICO.

We can answer the last one. The UK's Information Commissioner confirmed to us it was not told of the incident by AnyVan. "Not all breaches need to be reported. Organisations are required to establish the likelihood of the risk to people's rights and freedoms. If a risk is likely, the organisation must notify the ICO; if a risk is unlikely, it doesn't have to report it."

A spokeswoman added: "However, if an organisation decides it does not need to report the breach, it needs to be able to justify this decision, so should document it."

Additional details of [breach reporting requirements](#) are here.

Neil Brown, tech lawyer at decoded:legal, told us the breach in AnyVan's case is "pretty limited in scope of personal data" and he could understand why it had opted not to tell the ICO.

**Updated at 14.27GMT on 19 January to add:**

AnyVan has sent us a statement following publication of this article to say that it did contact the ICO, "which has classified this as low risk due to the nature of the data."

"However, any matter involving customer data and privacy is taken extremely seriously and as such we have conducted a thorough review, engaged with third party technical consultants, put additional security measures in place, and of course notified potentially affected customers".

*The Register* has again asked the ICO to comment.

**Updated at 19 January at 15:08 to add:**

An ICO spokesperson told us: "In terms of us having received a data breach report, the position remains the same in that we don't appear to have received one."

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HEADLINE	01/19 Text phishing scam disguised as NY DMV
SOURCE	<a href="https://securityintelligence.com/news/text-phishing-disguised-as-new-york-state-dmv-messages/?web_view=true">https://securityintelligence.com/news/text-phishing-disguised-as-new-york-state-dmv-messages/?web_view=true</a>
GIST	Text phishing scammers are targeting New York state drivers with messages asking them to update their driver's licenses. Using the ongoing adoption of the <a href="#">REAL ID Act of 2005</a> in an attempt to make the scam sound legitimate, the attackers have used three specific text phishing messages, the <a href="#">New York State Department of Motor Vehicles (DMV)</a> said in December 2020.

When it comes to the wider world of digital attacks, this is classed as a phishing scam. The goal of the scammers is to encourage victims to submit personal information.

Learn what to look out for when it comes to this and similar text phishing scams. A message that says it comes from a government agency might be real or a government phishing scam.

### **The Fake Text Messages**

The New York DMV released three types of text phishing messages that serve as the opening salvo in this attack.

**Message No. 1:** The first attack message informs the recipient in broken English that anyone holding a driver's license must "update their contact to compliance regulation agreements."

**Message No. 2:** The next text phishing message does something similar, telling the recipient they need to modify their mailing and contact information in order to speed up compliance with new ID regulations. This version of the scheme mentions REAL ID by name.

Travelers might recognize REAL ID as a requirement for commercial flights. This form of identification provides proof of the minimum set of security requirements necessary for a person to enter a federal building or board a federally regulated commercial aircraft.

The text phishing message doesn't mention flights. Instead, it mentions 'travel' only. This might be an attempt to trick drivers into thinking they need a REAL ID to drive, travel by train or use other modes of transportation other than federally regulated commercial flights.

**Message No. 3:** The final text message parrots the previous two iterations but uses the most broken grammar of the three.

It reads as follows: "Due to update on our new regulation compliant, driver license holder must update their contact."

All three of the driver's license phishing messages redirect to a fake DMV website designed to steal information.

### **Other Text Phishing Attacks**

New York State DMV warned of a similar text phishing attack [in October 2020](#). In that case, threat actors were using scam text messages to redirect users to a fake DMV website. If someone clicked on it, the attackers could target them with identity theft and/or malware.

In another case, a text phishing scam used a pandemic relief payment as a cover story. The attack message informed the recipient they were entitled to \$600 if they clicked on an embedded link. These attackers used spoofing techniques to disguise their message as official correspondence from New York's Department of Labor, [Abnormal Security](#) discovered in December 2020. In the end, if you click on the campaign it leads to a fake New York government portal designed to steal information.

### **Anti-Phishing Best Practices**

These attacks highlight the need for employers to defend themselves against phishing attacks pretending to be government messages. They can do so by investing in creating a [security awareness training program](#). Seeing phishing attacks in a test setting can educate employees about some of the most common types of scams in use today, as well as emerging campaigns.

In addition, employers can consider using phishing prevention technical controls. These monitor their networks for suspicious actions, such as signs of attackers misusing a compromised account. Companies can also leverage [user behavior analytics](#) to monitor real users' behavior against a known baseline and to respond to anomalies before a threat actor makes their move.

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<b>HEADLINE</b>	<b>01/19 DNS-based attacks prominent again</b>
<b>SOURCE</b>	<a href="https://cyware.com/news/dns-based-attacks-are-becoming-prominent-again-d8fe5da1">https://cyware.com/news/dns-based-attacks-are-becoming-prominent-again-d8fe5da1</a>
<b>GIST</b>	<p>DNS infrastructure always remains an attractive target for cyber attackers and some recent targeted attacks on DNS highlight the increasingly sophisticated attack techniques used by hackers.</p> <p>New dynamics of the attack</p> <p>Attackers often target DNS via attacks such as tunneling, phishing, hijacking, cache poisoning, and DDoS, however, other attack methods have also been observed. Recently, an attack campaign was found using dynamic DNS services to scale up their attack.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The DNS-based attack dubbed <a href="#">Operation Spalax</a> was targeting the Colombian government and private companies, especially those belonging to energy and metallurgical industries, via dynamic DNS services.</li> <li>• Attackers were using a pool of domain names that were dynamically assigned to IP addresses. By doing this, one domain name can be associated with several IP addresses over a period of time and vice versa.</li> </ul> <p>Recent DNS-based attacks</p> <p>A <a href="#">SAD DNS (Side channel AttackeD DNS)</a> vulnerability has been observed to be reviving DNS cache poisoning differently. The vulnerability is being tracked as CVE-2020-25705.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• DeathStalker, a <a href="#">hacker-for-hire service</a> group, has been found using an unknown malicious implant that uses DNS over HTTPS as a C2 channel. Later, the implant was named PowerPepper.</li> <li>• In addition, an <a href="#">unnamed RAT</a> was found to be hiding as a DNS or an SSH server daemon to evade detection and hinder analysis. The unnamed RAT was associated with Magecart.</li> <li>• The <a href="#">Voyager Digital LLC</a> (cryptocurrency brokerage platform) halted trading after suffering a cyberattack targeting their DNS configuration.</li> </ul> <p>Additional insights</p> <p>A recent <a href="#">survey</a> discovered that DNS services suffered the most attacks in 2020, with 16% of respondents reporting DNS service based attacks on their telecom organization.</p> <p>Closing lines</p> <p>Experts suggest performing context-aware and real-time DNS traffic analysis for behavioral threat detection, keeping DNS resolvers private and protected, and regularly updating the operating system and software.</p>
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<b>HEADLINE</b>	<b>01/19 'Classiscam' targets Europe marketplaces</b>
<b>SOURCE</b>	<a href="https://cyware.com/news/telegram-based-classiscam-operation-targeting-users-of-european-marketplaces-dd8d2183">https://cyware.com/news/telegram-based-classiscam-operation-targeting-users-of-european-marketplaces-dd8d2183</a>
<b>GIST</b>	<p>Recently, Russian-speaking scammers have been observed running a scam-as-a-service operation dubbed Classiscam. According to the <a href="#">Group-IB</a> Computer Emergency Response Team (CERT-GIB), Classiscam comprises around 40 groups of cybercriminals, operating in the U.S. and across several European countries such as Bulgaria, Czech Republic, France, Poland, and Romania.</p> <p>About Classiscam</p> <p>The Classiscam scheme has been leveraging Telegram bots that provide scammers with ready-to-use phishing pages mimicking popular classifieds, marketplaces, and delivery services to steal money and payment data.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Initially started in the summer of 2019, the <a href="#">Classiscam operation</a> was first recorded in Russia. It was at the peak in the spring of 2020 during the COVID-19 pandemic.</li> </ul>



	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The scammers have been publishing bait ads on popular marketplaces and classifieds, claiming to offer various products such as cameras, game consoles, laptops, smartphones, and similar items for sale at low prices.</li> <li>• To convert the deals, the scammers move the conversation to a third-party messaging service and use local phone numbers when speaking with the victim.</li> <li>• The threat actors have been actively impersonating several popular classifieds, delivery services brands, and marketplaces, such as Leboncoin, Allegro, DHL, FAN Courier, and OLX.</li> <li>• By the end of 2020, the Classiscam operation involved more than 5,000 scammers. All the cybercriminal groups altogether have made at least USD 6.5 million in 2020.</li> </ul> <p>Recent Telegram-based attacks</p> <p>In the recent past, several attackers have been observed abusing the Telegram messaging service.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• A few days ago, a dark web vendor dubbed <a href="#">Triangulum</a> was observed selling a RAT capable of complete device takeover and exfiltration of sensitive data from popular social networking apps.</li> <li>• In December, <a href="#">Agent Tesla</a> malware was using Telegram to exfiltrate data for C&amp;C infrastructure.</li> </ul> <p>Security recommendations</p> <p>An ever-increasing misuse of Telegram, either as a C&amp;C channel for remotely controlled malware or for hosting bots, is an indication that attackers are actively investing their time in this platform. Therefore, experts suggest users remain cautious while using Telegram-based services, rely on official chats only, and avoid third-party messenger redirection.</p>
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HEADLINE	<b>01/19 Concern: copycats of SolarWinds tactics</b>
SOURCE	<a href="https://www.wired.com/story/solarwinds-hacker-methods-copycats/">https://www.wired.com/story/solarwinds-hacker-methods-copycats/</a>
GIST	<p><b>ONE OF THE</b> most chilling aspects of <a href="#">Russia's recent hacking spree</a>—which breached numerous United States government agencies among other targets—was the successful use of a “supply chain attack” to gain tens of thousands of potential targets from a single compromise at the IT services firm SolarWinds. But this wasn't the only striking feature of the assault. After that initial foothold, the attackers bored deeper into their victims' networks with simple and elegant strategies. Now researchers are bracing for a surge in those techniques from other attackers.</p> <p>The SolarWinds hackers used their access in many cases to infiltrate their victims' Microsoft 365 email services and Microsoft Azure Cloud infrastructure—both treasure troves of potentially sensitive and valuable data. The challenge of preventing these types of intrusions into Microsoft 365 and Azure is that they don't depend on specific vulnerabilities that can simply be patched. Instead hackers use an initial attack that positions them to manipulate Microsoft 365 and Azure in a way that appears legitimate. In this case, to great effect.</p> <p>"Now there are other actors that will obviously adopt these techniques, because they go after what works," says Matthew McWhirt, a director at Mandiant Fireeye, <a href="#">first identified</a> the Russian campaign at the beginning of December.</p> <p>In the recent barrage, hackers compromised a SolarWinds product, Orion, and distributed tainted updates that gave the attackers a foothold on the network of every SolarWinds customer who downloaded the malicious patch. From there, the attackers could use their newfound privileges on victim systems to take control of certificates and keys used to generate system authentication tokens, known as SAML tokens, for Microsoft 365 and Azure. Organizations manage this authentication infrastructure locally, rather than in the cloud, through a Microsoft component called Active Directory Federation Services.</p> <p>Once an attacker has the network privileges to manipulate this authentication scheme, they can generate legitimate tokens to access any of the organization's Microsoft 365 and Azure accounts, no passwords or multifactor authentication required. From there, the attackers can also create new accounts, and grant themselves the high privileges needed to roam freely without raising red flags.</p>

“We think it’s critical that governments and the private sector are increasingly transparent about nation-state activity so we can all continue the global dialogue about protecting the internet,” Microsoft said in a December [blog post](#) that linked these techniques to the SolarWinds hackers. “We also hope publishing this information helps raise awareness among organizations and individuals about steps they can take to protect themselves.”

The National Security Agency also detailed the techniques in a December report.

“It is critical when running products that perform authentication that the server and all the services that depend on it are properly configured for secure operation and integration,” the NSA [wrote](#). “Otherwise, SAML tokens could be forged, granting access to numerous resources.”

Microsoft has since [expanded](#) its monitoring tools in Azure Sentinel. And Mandiant is also releasing a [tool](#) that makes it easier for groups to assess whether someone has been monkeying with their authentication token generation for Azure and Microsoft 365, like surfacing information on new certificates and accounts.

Now that the techniques have been exposed very publicly, more organizations may be on the lookout for such malicious activity. But SAML token manipulation is a risk for virtually all cloud users, not just those on Azure, as some researchers have warned for years. In 2017, Shaked Reiner, a researcher at the corporate defense firm CyberArk, [published](#) findings about the technique, dubbed GoldenSAML. He even built a proof of concept [tool](#) that security practitioners could use to test whether their clients were susceptible to potential SAML token manipulation.

Reiner suspects that attackers haven't used GoldenSAML techniques more often in the past few years simply because it requires such a high level of access to pull off. Still, he says he has always viewed increased deployment as inevitable, given the technique's efficacy. It also builds on another well known Microsoft Active Directory attack from 2014 called [Golden Ticket](#).

“We did feel validated when we saw that this technique had been used by the SolarWinds attackers, but we weren’t really surprised,” Reiner says. “Even though it’s a difficult technique to perform, it still gives attacker a lot of crucial advantages that they need. Because the SolarWinds attackers used it so successfully I’m sure that other attackers will note this and use it more and more from now on.”

Along with Microsoft and others, Mandiant and CyberArk are now working to help their clients take precautions to catch Golden SAML-type attacks sooner or respond more quickly if they find that such a hack is already underway. In a report published on Tuesday, Mandiant details how organizations can check whether these tactics have been used against them, and set up controls to make it harder for attackers to use them undetected in the future.

“Previously we have seen other actors use these methods in pockets, but never to the scale of UNC2452,” the group that perpetrated the SolarWinds attack, says Mandiant's McWhirt. “So what we wanted to do is put together a sort of concise playbook for how organizations investigate and remediate this and harden against it.”

For starters, organizations must make sure their “identity provider services,” like the server that holds token signing certificates, are configured correctly and that network managers have adequate visibility into what those systems are doing and being asked to do. It's also critical to lock down access for authentication systems so that not too many user accounts have privileges to interact with and modify them. Finally, it's important to monitor how tokens are actually used to catch anomalous activity. For example, you might watch for tokens that were issued months or years ago, but only sprang to life and started being used to authenticate activity a few weeks ago. Reiner also points out that attackers' efforts to cover their tracks can be a tell for organizations with strong monitoring; if you see a token being widely used, but can't locate the logs from when the token was issued, it could be a sign of malicious activity.

	“As more organizations transfer more and more of their systems to the cloud, SAML is the defacto authentication mechanism being used in those environments,” CyberArk's Reiner says. “So it's really natural to have this attack vector. Organizations need to be ready, because this is not really a vulnerability—this is an inherent part of the protocol. So you're still going to have this issue in the future.”
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HEADLINE	<b>01/19 DOH data dashboard: vaccine progress</b>
SOURCE	<a href="https://mynorthwest.com/2481054/washington-doh-dashboard-covid-vaccine-progress/">https://mynorthwest.com/2481054/washington-doh-dashboard-covid-vaccine-progress/</a>
GIST	<p>The Washington State Department of Health, in partnership with Microsoft AI for Health, is now displaying COVID-19 vaccine data on its <a href="#">data dashboard</a> to share the progress being made statewide as more people get vaccinated.</p> <p>The dashboard includes a “high-level snapshot” under the “Current Status” tab, the state DOH explains in a <a href="#">news release about the data update</a>, as well as a new “Vaccinations” tab with statewide and county-level data on where, when, and how many people are being vaccinated.</p> <p>You can view the number of doses given in each county, as well as across the state of Washington, in a map view or by date. At the state level, you can also see the number of doses delivered to providers, and delivered through the federal long-term care program.</p> <p>As <a href="#">part of a series of updates announced by Gov. Inslee on Monday</a> intended to speed up vaccine distribution statewide, health care providers are required to report when they give a COVID vaccine to a patient within 24 hours of doing so. Most of the data should then appear in the DOH’s dashboard within a week of when the vaccine dose was given. It will be updated on Mondays, Wednesdays, and Fridays.</p> <p>“This partnership and expanded data sharing is what we mean when we talk about DOH prioritizing innovation and engagement,” said state Secretary of Health Umair A. Shah, MD, MPH. “Ensuring access to this type of data is an important part of our commitment to equity, innovation and engagement. The dashboard will provide a critical window for the public to understand what’s happening in our vaccine response.”</p> <p>Additional metrics will be added to the dashboard in the future.</p>
<a href="#">Return to Top</a>	<p>Click on link to view DOH data dashboard:</p> <p><a href="https://www.doh.wa.gov/Emergencies/COVID19/DataDashboard">https://www.doh.wa.gov/Emergencies/COVID19/DataDashboard</a></p>

HEADLINE	<b>01/19 Ransomware hit 2300 govt. entities 2020</b>
SOURCE	<a href="https://www.washingtontimes.com/news/2021/jan/19/ransomware-hit-2300-us-government-health-care-and-/">https://www.washingtontimes.com/news/2021/jan/19/ransomware-hit-2300-us-government-health-care-and-/</a>
GIST	<p>Ransomware attacks affected more than 2,300 U.S. government entities, health care facilities and schools in 2020, according to security software company <a href="#">Emsisoft</a>.</p> <p>Ransomware is malicious software that requires payment from its victims in exchange for restoring access to systems or data held hostage by the cyberattackers. <a href="#">Emsisoft</a>’s report did not analyze private sector cyberattacks because the company said such attacks were too infrequently disclosed to provide an accurate portrayal of the threats.</p> <p>“The fact that there were no ransomware-related deaths in the U.S. last year was simply due to good luck,” said Fabian Wosar, <a href="#">Emsisoft</a> chief technology officer, in the report. “Security needs to be bolstered across the public sector before that luck runs out and lives are lost.”</p>

	<p>The total cost of the 113 ransomware attacks observed by <a href="#">Emsisoft</a> on federal, state and local government entities cost an estimated \$915 million. As a result, <a href="#">Emsisoft</a> is advocating that government entities make changes quickly or risk turning 2021 into a “banner year for cybercriminals.”</p> <p>“We anticipate there will be more cases of data theft in 2021 than there were in 2020 — likely, at least twice as many,” <a href="#">Emsisoft</a> said in the report. “Like legitimate businesses, criminal enterprises adopt strategies that are proven to work, and data theft has indeed been proven to work.”</p> <p><a href="#">Emsisoft</a>’s report said part of the problem facing those targeted with ransomware is that public sector victims of ransomware are not required to disclose the attacks, which makes it difficult for policymakers to know precisely how many incidents there are, how many demands are paid and what the full cost of the cyberattacks are.</p> <p>“2021 need not be a repeat of 2020,” Mr. Wosar said in the report. “Proper levels of investment in people, processes and IT would result in significantly fewer ransomware incidents and those incidents which did occur would be less severe, less disruptive and less costly.”</p>
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HEADLINE	<b>01/19 AI detected 4 intriguing email attacks</b>
SOURCE	<a href="https://www.darkreading.com/4-intriguing-email-attacks-detected-by-ai-in-2020/d/d-id/1339927">https://www.darkreading.com/4-intriguing-email-attacks-detected-by-ai-in-2020/d/d-id/1339927</a>
GIST	<p>Cyberattackers used and abused email in many creative, fruitful ways last year. They flooded inboxes with <a href="#">fearware</a>. Took over accounts and manipulated companies' trust in their suppliers. Slipped malicious messages past standard validation checks. They treated domains like they were disposable; using a domain briefly, then discarding it before security tools could smack it with a bad reputation.</p> <p>Yes, it was an exciting year for email attacks. But which attacks were the coolest of them all?</p> <p>Dan Fein, director of email security products at Darktrace, gives us his favorites, detected by <a href="#">Darktrace's Antigena Email</a> AI-powered email security tool. Here are the top four receiving that dubious honor:</p> <p><b>1. Hidden in the Snow</b></p> <p>Skiers hoping to escape quarantine could easily be tempted by messages offering deals to the slopes at Vail Resorts. And if so, they might have found themselves the victim of a clever credential theft scheme. The phishing link inside the message appeared to send users to Vail Resorts, and then redirect them to Snow.com, the resort's legitimate partner company and booking service. That wasn't all it did though.</p> <p>Fein points to the "p1" parameter in the URL. The attacker actually sent the victim to a phony login page at s-ay.xyz. To further support the disguise, the phony login page was preloaded with the victim's email address in the "username" field. And because the URL is so long, even a security-savvy user who dutifully scrolled over the hyperlink to check its destination before clicking would probably have only seen a truncated URL, never seeing the suspicious parameter.</p> <p>"This would go undetected [by most security tools] because vailresorts.com has a clean reputation." says Fein. "We think it's interesting because if you look at this link in a certain way you <i>can</i> detect this kind of stuff. You <i>can</i> recognize that it's an unusual link, because there's a hidden redirect in there."</p> <p><b>2. Sneaking by SPF</b></p> <p>"Whenever we see validation checks like SPF or DKIM that say this message is being sent from infrastructure we expect it to be sent from," says Fein, "then our customers say 'oh SPF passed, DKIM passed. Isn't [this message] good?' And then we think 'no.' You <i>always</i> want to put your guard up."</p> <p>Case in point: a message purportedly from the target company's IT department, linking to a Microsoft Office form. It preloaded the user's email address in the Office 365 login page. The message passed SPF and DKIM validation checks.</p>

Yet, Darktrace detected that it was likely sent from a compromised account. (And not just because the message contained strange syntax like the phrase "Click Password.")

"[Antigena looks] for context," says Fein. He cites some examples of potentially anomalous context. "So, all of a sudden what normally comes from Outlook comes from a Python script. Just looking at user agents of an email; things that start to look automated. Or the infrastructure – although it's coming from Outlook, maybe it's being sent from [an unexpected country]."

### 3. An Unappetizing Link

Here's another example of a message claiming to be from the IT helpdesk that was no help at all. The attacker slid some non-Latin characters into the sender name. (Some attackers are now using [hidden text](#) in which they put invisible characters between the letters of an email so it doesn't trigger email defenses with phrases like "helpdesk" or "password expired.")

The message itself was innocuous, says Fein. The document attached to that message was relatively tame too. But a hyperlink inside that document...that was a problem. It posed as a link to an online restaurant reservation booking service, but in fact was malicious.

Fein says that Darktrace can perform a number of targeted actions, depending upon the severity of a risk: redirect a suspicious link, snip the link entirely, strip the attachment from the message, or block the message, for example.

"So just because an attachment has a suspicious 'something' in it doesn't mean you have to hold [the attachment] back entirely," he says, "but in this case, it did."

### 4. Email Gateway Spoof

Another favorite of Fein's hit close to home for him, because the attacker spoofed an email security company. The message came from a spoofed Cisco Ironport address and claimed to contain an archive file.

There was no existing relationship between the sender and recipient – strike one against this message --but another anomaly also raised alarm bells. The collection of recipients themselves was identified by Darktrace's AI as highly unusual.

As Fein explains, some groups of users are more likely to be on a message thread together, and others aren't; some are expected to receive external messages from unknown senders, and others aren't. So, if a message is sent to a random sprinkling of employees from the human resources department, the development team, and other unrelated lines of business, for example, Darktrace's technology will take notice.

The email attacks that impressed (and distressed) Fein this year are these that used clever techniques to give target recipients – and their security tools – more reasons to trust them.

"They use some company that you might recognize. Or recognize their infrastructure. ... Or you receive an email from someone you know and then you think you're logging in to respond to them," he says. "It all just adds credibility to the fact that what you're about to do makes sense."

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HEADLINE	01/19 Report: 560 healthcare providers victims
SOURCE	<a href="https://healthitsecurity.com/news/560-healthcare-providers-fell-victim-to-ransomware-attacks-in-2020">https://healthitsecurity.com/news/560-healthcare-providers-fell-victim-to-ransomware-attacks-in-2020</a>

January 19, 2021 - In the midst of responding to COVID-19, the healthcare sector faced a significant number of ransomware attacks in 2020 with 560 healthcare provider facilities falling victim to the malware variant, according to the latest Emsisoft State of Ransomware [report](#).

The last quarter of 2019 saw an unprecedented number of ransomware incidents in the healthcare sector. And while the number of reported successful attacks [petered](#) off during the first half of 2020, those numbers drastically increased through a coordinated ransomware wave that began in [September](#). Overall, Emsisoft data shows at least 2,354 US government, healthcare, and schools were impacted by ransomware attacks in 2020.

The education sector saw the greatest number of successful attacks with 1,681 schools, colleges, and universities impacted by the threat. Federal, state, and municipal governments and agencies reported 113 successful attacks.

The second half of the year saw some of the greatest impact from ransomware, with a host of healthcare ransomware victims were driven into EHR downtime. These attacks also caused other life-threatening disruptions, including the diversion of ambulances, inaccessible lab tests, and the like.

Hackers continued to heavily target the healthcare sector throughout the year, with at least 80 separate incidents. For Emsisoft, the most significant incident was seen with the attack on Universal Health [Services](#), which operates more than 400 hospitals and care facilities in the US.

All sites were impacted by the attack, which was first disclosed by employees who were concerned by what appeared to be IT issues at facilities across the country.

“The impact of the attacks was alarming: ambulances were rerouted, radiation treatments for cancer patients were delayed, medical records were rendered temporarily inaccessible and, in some cases, permanently lost, while hundreds of staff were furloughed as a result of the disruptions,” researchers wrote.

A prime example of ransomware fallout can be seen with the attack on the University of Vermont Health Network. The health system was forced to operate under EHR downtime procedures for more than a month, with its patient portal, EHR, and lab result inaccessible for most of its care sites during that time.

The main campus medical center was the hardest hit by the attack, including a lack of electronic communications across the network. Given the severity and extent of the attack, the Governor of Vermont [deployed](#) the Army National Guard’s Cyber Response to assist with recovery efforts.

Further, estimates show the attack cost UVM about \$1.5 million a day in increased expenses and lost revenue. Those costs don’t include expenditures on recovering the system from the attack, according to local news outlet *VT Digger*.

With at least 42 days since the launch of the attack, the total impact could reach a total of at least \$63 million. The health system was also forced to push back its [planned](#) EHR implementation due to the attack.

The Emsisoft report highlighted the other severe fallout from ransomware: exfiltration and extortion effort. [Coveware](#) data found extortion attempts occur in half of all ransomware attacks. Part of the increase could be attributed to a rise in the number of hacking groups leveraging exfiltration.

At the start of 2020, Emsisoft noted that just the Maze hacking group leveraged this malicious tactic. But by the end of the year, at least 17 other cybercriminal groups adopted extortion and published a record amount of stolen data in online dark web forums.



In total, at least 58 public sector entities had data stolen ahead of a ransomware attack, with 56 occurring during the second half of the year. And more than 1,300 private sector companies, many US-based, lost data through exfiltration.

For healthcare, PHI and other sensitive data was stolen and published online in at least 12 incidents. All of the incidents occurred during the second half of 2020.

“This is simply the number of companies which had data published on leak sites and takes no account of the companies which paid to prevent publication,” researchers wrote. “We believe it is probable that some data was sold to companies’ competitors or passed to other governments.”

“A number of threat actors are known to auction data or to invite offers from interested third parties, while others may contract to other governments or even be in their direct employ,” they added.

What’s more, 2021 is on pace to be another severe year for cyberattacks unless entities take significant action now. Public sector entities may face the greatest challenges, as they remain prime targets for hackers and are typically less secure.

Emsisoft also predicts that data theft will double in the coming year, as cybercriminals adopt proven strategies in their attacks. Providers and organizations from other sectors continue to pay ransom demands, which proves exfiltration is a successful business model.

For healthcare providers, it’s imperative to adopt a proactive approach to cybersecurity. Administrators and other security leaders should review previous insights from Microsoft, the Office for Civil [Rights](#), the [FBI](#), and [CISA](#), among others, to tackle the ransomware threat before falling victim.

“We also anticipate that cybercriminals will put stolen data to more use, using it to attack the individuals to which it relates in order to put additional pressure on the organizations from which it was stolen,” researchers noted. “The ransomware problem will not be easy to solve... but solutions must nonetheless be found.”

“2021 need not be a repeat of 2020,” Emsisoft CTO Fabian Woser, said in a statement. “Proper levels of investment in people, processes and IT would result in significantly fewer ransomware incidents and those incidents which did occur would be less severe, less disruptive and less costly.”

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HEADLINE	01/19 ‘New dimensions’ cyber espionage tactics
SOURCE	<a href="https://www.darkreading.com/threat-intelligence/solarwinds-attack-underscores-new-dimension-in-cyber-espionage-tactics/d/d-id/1339928">https://www.darkreading.com/threat-intelligence/solarwinds-attack-underscores-new-dimension-in-cyber-espionage-tactics/d/d-id/1339928</a>
GIST	<p>The complex cyberattack campaign against major US government agencies and corporations including Microsoft and FireEye has driven home the reality of how attackers are setting their sights on targets' cloud-based services such as Microsoft 365 and Azure Active Directory to access user credentials — and ultimately the organizations' most valuable and timely information.</p> <p>Today Malwarebytes revealed that it, too, was compromised by the same attackers who infected SolarWinds' Orion network management software to reach many of the targets in the campaign — but via a different attack vector that gained privileged access to 365 and Azure. "After an extensive investigation, we determined the attacker only gained access to a limited subset of internal company emails. We found no evidence of unauthorized access or compromise in any of our internal on-premises and production environments," said Marcin Kleczynski, CEO and co-founder of Malwarebytes, <a href="#">said today in a blog post disclosing the breach</a>, noting that Malwarebytes is not a SolarWinds customer.</p>

Security researchers and incident responders investigating [the massive attacks](#) — believed to be the handiwork of Russia's nation-state hacking machine — meanwhile continue to find new weapons used in the campaign, even as new victims come forward.

Symantec today detailed a fourth malware tool, a dropper dubbed Raindrop, used to move laterally in the victim's network and deliver a malicious Cobalt Strike payload onto other computers. Unlike the previously discovered Teardrop dropper used in the attacks to run Cobalt Strike, Raindrop doesn't appear to have been spread directly by the Sunburst Trojan planted in SolarWinds' Orion software updates: "Instead, it appears elsewhere on networks where at least one computer has already been compromised by Sunburst," Symantec's Threat Hunter Team [wrote in blog post today](#).

Incident response (IR) experts at FireEye Mandiant — where the attacks were first detected and traced to a compromise of SolarWinds' software — [today published a white paper](#) that explains in detail how the SolarWinds attackers as well as other threat groups are hacking organizations from their on-premises networks to Microsoft 365 and other cloud services. Mandiant's report explains how the attackers were able to slice through victim organizations' Microsoft 365 cloud environments after hopping onto their SolarWinds software updates, mainly attacking Active Directory and stealing and forging user credentials.

As details of the attack chain and malware gradually emerge, experts say the epic attack signals a new normal for cyber espionage. Costin Raiu, head of Kaspersky's global research and analysis team, says the SolarWinds attack campaign illustrates how nation-state attackers are going after real-time information — and how challenging it is for targeted organizations to detect it. "I think there's a new dimension of [nation-state] hacking with all of the Office 365 and Azure AD Cloud out there," he says.

"Everything is happening in the cloud and no one sees anything. At best, you [the victim] get a notification from Microsoft that something bad is going on," Raiu notes.

Cloud visibility indeed has been [one of the biggest problems and security weaknesses](#) for organizations the past year. COVID-19 last year forced many businesses to accelerate their cloud migration plans when they relocated employees to makeshift home offices, creating hybrid physical and cloud-based IT infrastructures practically overnight. Microsoft 365 replaced enterprise email servers.

Most reputable cloud-based services such as 365 come with built-in security controls, but it's still up to the customer to manage and configure those settings — and that's often the problem. It's a recipe for compromise by determined nation-state actors like the as-yet unidentified hacking team behind those attacks. FireEye refers to the attackers as UNC2452, while US government intelligence has [publicly cited Russia](#) as the perpetrator in the attacks. Most security firms thus far have declined to ID Russia or a specific nation-state group.

Raiu notes that while a foundation of cyber espionage traditionally has been about stealing sensitive documents, now there's a doubling down on real-time information-sharing and spying. "Nowadays it appears people understand the most sensitive information is being discussed with others. ... If you want real-time, actionable intel you go after email and instant" messaging platforms, he says.

As with the case of the SolarWinds attacks, that means getting to email accounts and mobile devices at the targeted organization. "Some of this can be quite stealthy," he says, and it's often difficult to detect malware dropped on a mobile phone, for example. "It's a complex ecosystem."

### **365 Mistakes**

Matthew McWhirt, director at FireEye's Mandiant and co-author of its newly released report on the SolarWinds attackers, says his IR teams see an abundance of 365 user accounts with too many and unnecessary privileges that leave the organization vulnerable to attackers, especially when they migrate their on-site Active Directory user accounts to Azure AD and 365. A common misstep: syncing an on-premises privileged account to one that manages Azure AD and 365. That gives an attacker a lateral path from the internal network to organization's cloud-based 365 environment.

Users should separate the account that manages 365 from the domain admin account for the internal network, he says.

Mandiant has spotted attackers finding and stealing credentials from on-premises, privileged AD accounts and then connecting to 365. Then the attacker can connect to and gain a foothold in the victim's 365 account "without the continued need for on-premises access," the company wrote in its paper.

The security vendor has also released a free script-based tool on GitHub — Azure AD Investigator — which checks Microsoft 365 tenants for UNC2452 attack techniques.

"A lot of what we see is technology overload, honestly," notes Doug Bienstock, manager of professional services at Mandiant, co-author of the new white paper on UNC2452. "When organizations are using [Microsoft] Exchange in their own data center, it's [Exchange] well-defined. ... But when they switch to 365, all of a sudden they have 50 different apps and all different ways of accessing it, with modern standards like OAuth and SAML. Some organizations are not well equipped to deal with it."

Microsoft, which last month [discovered](#) its own SolarWinds software had been compromised in the attacks, has published [specific guidelines](#) for defending 365 from SolarWinds and other attacks via the internal network. "Alongside our industry partners and the security community, Microsoft continues to investigate the extent of the recent nation-state attack on SolarWinds," a Microsoft spokesperson said in a statement to Dark Reading. "Our goal is to provide the latest threat intelligence, Indicators of Compromise (IOC)s, and guidance across our products and solutions to help the community respond, harden infrastructure, and begin to recover from this unprecedented attack. As new information becomes available, we will make updates to the article at <https://aka.ms/solorigate>."

The underlying issue with organizations insufficiently locking down 365 is an age-old one: "What we are seeing is more a tension between security and usability" with 365 attacks, Mandiant's Bienstock says. Attackers are going after apps integrated with 365, so protecting them requires "hardening" them or just turning off access to apps or protocols you don't need, he and his co-authors advise in their paper.

UNC2452 and other threat groups have moved laterally from the victim's network to 365 cloud-based accounts via a mix of four basic approaches, according to Mandiant: pilfering the Active Directory Federation Services token-signing certificate and using that to create fake tokens and to pose as a legitimate user to 365; adding an Azure AD backdoor to forge tokens; hijacking a 365 app via rogue credentials; and abusing and compromising privileged user credentials from the enterprise network that are synced to the victim's 365 environment.

"The intrusion is centered around abuse of trust," notes Joe Slowik, senior security researcher at DomainTools, on the attack campaign. "That's what makes this a relatively difficult thing to deal with."

The attacks in the campaign that began with the SolarWinds Orion infection basically scored the attackers a network map of their target's environment. Chris Morales, head of security analytics at Vectra, a network threat and detection response provider, says Orion access gave the attackers the a more efficient way to pinpoint how to get to what they wanted from the victims. "In an attack life cycle, speed and time is the most important thing in security. How long it takes them to get in and get to what they care about," he says. "Network recon is a huge opportunity for detection," he says, so already having that map made the attack easier and less likely to get detected.

"Sunburst [the SolarWinds attack] is a blueprint for future attacks. It shortens the gap of how long an attack will take," Morales adds.

Microsoft 365 is one of the largest attack surfaces in many organizations today, he says. When attackers like these get into 365, it's powerful: "Now they are persistent and stay in Office. ... You now see attacks that never leave Office. They've taken over identities and other accounts."

	The attackers conducted a lot of "surgical" hands-on-keyboard hacking, which appears to indicate a very targeted campaign, Kaspersky's Raiu says. Once they were ready to home in on a victim, they deployed Cobalt Strike red-team software, which then requires human control, he notes. "There's a limited capacity for all of this manual work."
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HEADLINE	<b>01/19 Parler reappears; Russian-owned web help</b>
SOURCE	<a href="https://www.bloomberg.com/news/articles/2021-01-19/parler-home-page-reappears-with-ceo-calling-return-inevitable">https://www.bloomberg.com/news/articles/2021-01-19/parler-home-page-reappears-with-ceo-calling-return-inevitable</a>
GIST	<p>Parler, the social network popular with the alt-right and conspiracy theorists, reappeared with the help of a Russian-owned web security service as the website hunts for a way around bans that took it offline earlier this month.</p> <p>“Our return is inevitable due to hard work, and persistence against all odds,” Chief Executive Officer John Matze wrote in a new post, the latest since Amazon Web Services stopped hosting the site and it was banned from Apple Inc.’s and Google’s app stores. “Despite the threats and harassment not one Parler employee has quit. We are becoming closer and stronger as a team.”</p> <p>Parler, which was dropped by the big tech companies after it was used by members to incite violence at the U.S. Capitol, is now relying on a hosting service from DDoS-Guard Corp., which is owned by two Russians, Evgenii Marchenko and Aleksei Likhachev, according to documents filed with Companies House, a U.K. agency that registers company information and makes it available to the public. DDoS-Guard’s website lists an Edinburgh location for its registered office.</p> <p>Public data associated with the Parler.com domain name shows that one of the internet servers it directs visitors to is routed via DDoS-Guard. Another server, specifically for routing Parler.com email but not website content, is an Outlook.com address, operated by <a href="#">Microsoft Corp.</a></p> <p>A spokeswoman for DDoS-Guard said the company was not hosting Parler and declined to comment on what services it was providing to the social media app. It confirmed it did store customer data as part of its offering.</p> <p>On Sunday, Apple CEO Tim Cook defended Apple’s decision to delist the Parler app despite complaints from critics that the move impinges on free speech.</p> <p>“We looked at the incitement to violence that was on there,” Cook said on <a href="#">Fox News Sunday</a>. “We don’t consider that free speech and incitement to violence has an intersection.”</p> <p>Parler’s domain name is now registered with Epik Inc., a website services company based in Sammamish, Washington, according to public records made available by internet regulator Icann. Epik is also the domain registrar for Gab, another less restrictive social networking site popular with the far right.</p> <p>Most of the features on Parler.com appeared to remain down early Tuesday, besides statements from Matze and other employees. Members are unable to log in or post messages and the app is still unavailable in the <a href="#">Apple Inc.</a> or Google Play stores.</p> <p>“While we were not expecting Parler to move their domain name to Epik on the 11th of January, we are very thankful for the opportunity,” said Epik spokesman Robert Davis in an email. “It has afforded some great discussions on how Parler can be an inspiring part of the progression and evolution of future social media.”</p> <p>Microsoft didn’t immediately respond to a request for comment.</p>

	Before its ban, Parler -- which has less restrictive terms dictating what members can post and was endorsed by some Republican lawmakers and media figures -- had seen a surge in users as <a href="#">Twitter Inc.</a> and <a href="#">Facebook Inc.</a> banished outgoing President Donald Trump along with users and groups that supported the violence.
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HEADLINE	<b>01/19 Raindrop: 4<sup>th</sup> malware in SolarWinds hack</b>
SOURCE	<a href="https://www.zdnet.com/article/fourth-malware-strain-discovered-in-solarwinds-incident/">https://www.zdnet.com/article/fourth-malware-strain-discovered-in-solarwinds-incident/</a>
GIST	<p>Cyber-security firm Symantec said it identified another malware strain that was used during the SolarWinds supply chain attack, bringing the total number to four, after the likes of Sunspot, Sunburst (Solorigate), and Teardrop.</p> <p>Named <b>Raindrop</b>, Symantec said the malware was used only during the very last stages of an intrusion, deployed only on the networks of very few selected targets.</p> <p>Symantec said it encountered only four Raindrop samples in the cases it investigated until today.</p> <p><b>TIMELINE OF THE SOLARWINDS SUPPLY CHAIN ATTACK</b></p> <p>But to understand Raindrop's role and position in these attacks, we must first go over the timeline of the entire SolarWinds incident.</p> <p>Based on reports and information published by Microsoft, FireEye, CrowdStrike, and others, the SolarWinds intrusion is believed to have taken place in mid-2019 when hackers, <a href="#">believed to be linked to the Russian government</a>, breached the internal network of SolarWinds, a Texas-based software maker.</p> <p>The intruders first deployed <a href="#">the Sunspot malware</a>, which they used exclusively inside SolarWinds' own network. CrowdStrike said the attackers used the malware to modify the build process of the SolarWinds Orion app and insert the <a href="#">Sunburst (Solorigate)</a> malware inside new versions of Orion, an IT inventory management system.</p> <p>These trojanized Orion versions went undetected and were active on the official SolarWinds update servers between March and June 2020. Companies who applied Orion updates also unwittingly installed the Sunburst malware on their systems.</p> <p>But the Sunburst malware wasn't particularly complex and didn't do much except gather info about the infected network and send the data to a remote server.</p> <p>Even if around 18,000 SolarWinds customers got themselves infected with the Sunburst malware, the Russian hacking group carefully selected its targets and opted to escalate attacks only in a handful of cases, for the likes of high-profile targets such as US government agencies, Microsoft, or security firm FireEye.</p> <p>When hackers decided to "escalate their access," they used Sunburst to download and install the Teardrop malware [see past reports from <a href="#">Symantec</a> and <a href="#">Check Point</a>].</p> <p><b>RAINDROP — TEARDROP'S SIBLING</b></p> <p>But Symantec says that in some cases, the hackers chose to deploy the Raindrop malware strain instead of the more widely used Teardrop.</p> <p>Despite being different strains, Symantec said the two backdoors had similar functionality, which the company described as being "a loader for [the] Cobalt Strike Beacon," which the intruders later used to escalate and broaden their access inside a hacked IT network.</p>

	<p>But while both Raindrop and Teardrop were used for the same purpose, Symantec said that some differences also exist between the two, most being under the hood, at the code level...The other major difference is how the two malware strains were deployed.</p> <p>Symantec said that the more widely used Teardrop was installed directly by the Sunburst malware, while Raindrop mysteriously appeared on systems where Sunburst was also found, with no direct evidence that Sunburst triggered its installation.</p> <p>The US security firm said it's currently investigating how Raindrop was installed.</p> <p>The most obvious avenue is found in previous reports on the SolarWinds hacks that mentioned that hackers also used the Sunburst malware to run various fileless PowerShell payloads, many of which would leave minimal forensic evidence on infected hosts. While unconfirmed, it may be possible that Raindrop is the result of these operations.</p> <p>But the lesson here is that security teams investigating SolarWinds incidents inside their networks now also need to scan for the presence of another malware strain — Raindrop.</p> <p>The <a href="#">Symantec report</a> released today includes indicators of compromise (IOCs) that the security firm has seen in the cases it investigated.</p>
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HEADLINE	<b>01/20 Chinese hackers target airline passengers</b>
SOURCE	<a href="https://www.zdnet.com/article/a-chinese-hacking-group-is-stealing-airline-passenger-details/">https://www.zdnet.com/article/a-chinese-hacking-group-is-stealing-airline-passenger-details/</a>
GIST	<p>A suspected Chinese hacking group has been attacking the airline industry for the past few years with the goal of obtaining passenger data in order to track the movement of persons of interest.</p> <p>The intrusions have been linked to a threat actor that the cyber-security has been tracking under the name of <b>Chimera</b>.</p> <p>Believed to be operating in the interests of the Chinese state, the group's activities were first described in a <a href="#">report [PDF]</a> and <a href="#">Black Hat presentation [PDF]</a> from CyCraft in 2020.</p> <p>The initial report mentioned a series of coordinated attacks against the Taiwanese superconductor industry. But in a new report published last week by NCC Group and its subsidiary Fox-IT, the two companies said the group's intrusions are broader than initially thought, having also targeted the airline industry.</p> <p>"NCC Group and Fox-IT observed this threat actor during various incident response engagements performed between October 2019 until April 2020," the two companies said.</p> <p>These attacks targeted semiconductor and airline companies in different geographical areas, and not just Asia, NCC and Fox-IT said.</p> <p>In the case of some victims, the hackers stayed hidden inside networks for up to three years before being discovered.</p> <p><b>HACKERS SCRAPED USER DATA FROM THE RAM OF FLIGHT BOOKING SERVERS</b></p> <p>While the attacks orchestrated against the semiconductor industry were aimed towards the theft of intellectual property (IP), the attacks against the airline industry were focused instead on something else.</p> <p>"The goal of targeting some victims appears to be to obtain Passenger Name Records (PNR)," the two companies said.</p>



"How this PNR data is obtained likely differs per victim, but we observed the usage of several custom DLL files used to continuously retrieve PNR data from memory of systems where such data is typically processed, such as flight booking servers."

### A TYPICAL CHIMERA ATTACK

The joint NCC and Fox-IT report also describes the Chimera group's typical modus operandi, which usually begins with collecting user login credentials that leaked in the public domain after data breaches at other companies.

This data is used for [credential stuffing](#) or [password spraying](#) attacks against a target's employee services, such as email accounts. Once in, the Chimera operators search for login details for corporate systems, such as Citrix systems and VPN appliances.

Once inside an internal network, the intruders usually deploy Cobalt Strike, a penetration-testing framework used for "adversary emulation," which they use to move laterally to as many systems as possible, searching for IP and passenger details.

The two security firms said the hackers were patient and thorough and would search until they found ways to traverse across segmented networks to reach systems of interest.

Once they found and collected the data they were after; this information was regularly uploaded to public cloud services like OneDrive, Dropbox, or Google Drive, knowing that traffic to these services wouldn't be inspected or blocked inside breached networks.

### TRACKING TARGETS OF INTEREST

While the NCC and Fox-IT report didn't speculate why the hackers targeted the airline industry and why they stole passenger data, this is pretty obvious.

In fact, it is very common for state-sponsored hacking groups to target airline companies, hotel chains, and telcos to obtain data they could use to track the movements and communications of persons of interest.

Past examples include Chinese group APT41, which targeted telcos with [special malware capable of stealing SMS messages](#). The attacks were believed to be related to China's efforts to track its Uyghur minority, with some of these efforts involving [hacking telcos to track Uyghur travelers' movements](#).

Another Chinese group that targeted telcos was APT10 (or Gallium), whose activities were detailed in [Cybereason's Operation Soft Cell report](#).

In addition, Chinese state-sponsored hackers were also [linked to the Marriott hack](#), during which they stole troves of hotel reservation details going back years.

But China isn't the only one engaging in these types of attacks.

Iranian group APT39 has also been linked to breaches at [telecommunication providers and travel companies](#) for the purpose of tracking Iranian dissidents, while another Iranian group, known as Greenbug, has been linked to hacks against [multiple telecom providers across Southeast Asia](#).

Then there's [Operation Specialist](#), a UK GCHQ operation that targeted Belgian telco Belgacom between 2010 and 2013.

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HEADLINE	01/19 DNSpooq flaws allow DNS hijacking
SOURCE	<a href="https://threatpost.com/dnspooq-flaws-allow-dns-hijacking-of-millions-of-devices/163163/">https://threatpost.com/dnspooq-flaws-allow-dns-hijacking-of-millions-of-devices/163163/</a>

Researchers have uncovered a set of flaws in dnsmasq, popular open-source software used for caching Domain Name System (DNS) responses for home and commercial routers and servers.

The set of seven flaws are comprised of buffer overflow issues and flaws allowing for DNS cache-poisoning attacks (also known as DNS spoofing). If exploited, these flaws could be chained together to allow remote code execution, denial of service and other attacks.

Researchers have labeled the set of vulnerabilities “DNSpooq,” a combination of DNS spoofing, the concept of “a spook spying on internet traffic,” and the “q” at the end of dnsmasq.

“DNSpooq is a series of vulnerabilities found in the ubiquitous open-source software dnsmasq, demonstrating that DNS is still insecure, 13 years after the last major attack was described,” said researchers with the JSOF research lab, [in a recent analysis](#).

Dnsmasq is installed on many home and commercial routers and servers in many organizations. The software’s storing of responses to previously asked DNS queries locally speeds up the DNS resolution process; however it has many other uses as well, including providing DNS services to support Wi-Fi hot-spots, enterprise guest networks, virtualization and ad blocking.

Researchers have identified at least 40 vendors who utilize dnsmasq in their products, including Cisco routers, Android phones, Aruba devices, Technicolor and Red Hat, as well as Siemens, Ubiquiti networks, Comcast and many others. In all, “millions” of devices are affected, they said.

### **DNS Cache Poisoning**

Three of the flaws (CVE-2020-25686, CVE-2020-25684 and CVE-2020-25685) could enable DNS cache poisoning.

DNS cache poisoning is a type of attack that enables DNS queries to be subverted. In a real-world situation, an attacker here could use unsolicited DNS responses to poison the DNS cache, convince unknowing internet browsers to a specially-crafted attacker-owned website, and then redirect them to malicious servers.

This could potentially lead to fraud and various other malicious attacks, if victims believe they are browsing to one website but are actually routed to another, said researchers. Other attacks could include phishing attacks or malware distribution.

“Traffic that might be subverted includes regular Internet browsing as well as other types of traffic, such as emails, SSH, remote desktop, RDP video and voice calls, software updates and so on,” said researchers.

### **Buffer Overflow**

Researchers also shed light on four buffer-overflow vulnerabilities (CVE-2020-25687, CVE-2020-25683, CVE-2020-25682 and CVE-2020-25681) in dnsmasq. The memory-corruption flaws can be triggered by a remote attacker using crafted DNS responses. The attack can lead to denial of service, information exposure and potentially remote code execution.

While the majority of these flaws are heap-based buffer-overflow issues that could lead to denial of service, one of the flaws is a high-severity issue that could potentially enable remote code execution when dnsmasq is configured to use domain name system security extensions (DNSSEC), a set of protocols that add a layer of security to the domain name system.

“For the buffer overflows and remote-code execution, devices that don’t use the DNSSEC feature will be immune,” said researchers. “DNSSEC is a security feature meant to prevent cache poisoning attacks and so we would not recommend turning it off, but rather updating to the newest version of dnsmasq.”

Researchers said that the approximately 1 million dnsmasq servers openly visible on the internet (according to Shodan) make attacks launched via the internet “very simple,” and that there are several real-world scenarios that set up an attacker to exploit these flaws.

“This may be possible in some cases, (we believe rare), even if the forwarder is not open to the internet,” they said.

Also, if a dnsmasq server is only configured to listen to connections received from within an internal network – and an attacker gains a foothold on any device in that network – they would be able to perform the attack. Or, if a dnsmasq server is only configured to listen to connections received from within an internal network but the network is open (including an airport network or a corporate guest network) an attacker could perform the attack.

### **The Impact**

The flaws have varying severity, with CVE-2020-25681 and CVE-2020-25682 being high severity. However, researchers said if these vulnerabilities were chained together they could lead to an array of multi-stage attacks.

“This is because exploiting some of the vulnerabilities makes it easier to exploit others,” said researchers. “For example, we found that combining CVE-2020-25682, CVE-2020-25684, and CVE-2020-25685 would result in CVE-2020-25682 having a lower attack complexity (with the same impact) and result in a combined CVSS of 9.8 according to our analysis.”

Researchers disclosed the flaws in August and publicly revealed them this month. These vulnerabilities are addressed in [dnsmasq 2.83](#); users of internet-of-things (IoT) and embedded devices that use dnsmasq should contact their vendors for further information regarding updates.

“With the help of CERT/CC and volunteers from several companies, a working group was formed, combining the expertise and extended reach of members from JSOF, CERT/CC, Cisco, Google, Red Hat, Pi-hole and Simon Kelley, the maintainer of dnsmasq, to ensure that the DNSpooq vulnerabilities would be effectively fixed and well documented and communicated,” said researchers.

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HEADLINE	<b>01/19 Hundreds networks host infected devices</b>
SOURCE	<a href="https://www.securityweek.com/hundreds-networks-still-host-devices-infected-vpnfilter-malware">https://www.securityweek.com/hundreds-networks-still-host-devices-infected-vpnfilter-malware</a>
GIST	<p><b>The VPNFilter malware is still present in hundreds of networks and malicious actors could take control of the infected devices, according to researchers at cybersecurity firm Trend Micro.</b></p> <p>Identified in 2018 and mainly focusing on Ukraine, VPNFilter rose to fame quickly due to the targeting of a large number of routers and network-attached storage (NAS) devices from ASUS, D-Link, Huawei, Linksys, MikroTik, Netgear, QNAP, TP-Link, Ubiquiti, UPVEL, and ZTE.</p> <p>Believed to be <a href="#">operated by Russian threat actor Sofacy</a>, with possible involvement from Sandworm, VPNFilter emerged as a major threat right from the start: 50 impacted device models, the potential to <a href="#">compromise critical infrastructure</a>, and approximately 500,000 bots observed across 54 countries.</p> <p>Deep analysis of the malware revealed <a href="#">extensive capabilities</a>: various modules allow it to map networks, exploit endpoints connected to infected devices, exfiltrate data, encrypt communications with the command and control (C&amp;C) server, find additional victims, and create a network of proxies for future abuse.</p> <p>VPNFilter first attempts to obtain the address of its C&amp;C server from an image hosted on Photobucket. If that fails, it attempts to obtain the C&amp;C address from toknowall[.]com, and if that also fails, it monitors incoming packets for a specially crafted TCP packet containing the IP of the C&amp;C server.</p>

In an effort to determine whether the botnet continues to pose a real threat after more than two years since the initial attacks, Trend Micro's security researchers reached out to the Shadowserver Foundation, which, in collaboration with Cisco Talos, the FBI, and the US Department of Justice, has sinkholed toknowall[.]com.

Data gathered from the sinkhole shows that 5,447 unique devices are still connecting to the domain, meaning that they are still infected. The number of infections, however, is believed to be higher, as the domain might be blocked at DNS level.

"It is important to remember that because these are routers and other similar types of devices, this number also represents thousands of infected networks, not simply individual machines. This means that the reach and visibility for attackers with a botnet like this can be substantial," Trend Micro says.

The security researchers also decided to check if it would be possible to feed a new IP address to infected devices, to see how many of them were still waiting for a second-stage payload. They crafted a packet, sent it, and noticed that 1,801 networks did respond to it, while 363 of the networks reached back to the sinkhole on port TCP 443.

"Although only 363 networks connected back to our sinkhole, we cannot assume that the 1,801 networks that gave us an initial positive response are clean. They might still be infected by VPNFilter, but the connection to our sinkhole could have been blocked if they are behind a firewall," Trend Micro says.

The networks that reached out, the researchers say, can easily be taken over by any threat actor with knowledge of how the VPNFilter malware works, and there's nothing to prevent that, from a technical perspective. The original actor too can regain control of these devices at any point in time, the researchers say.

The problem, Trend Micro explains, could be addressed through firmware updates, especially since the malware has been around for so long, and solutions to remedy infections do exist. Simply restarting the infected devices, however, won't solve the issue, as initially believed.

VPNFilter, the researchers believe, will continue to lurk around until the infected devices are replaced, as many of them lack an automated firmware update system, meaning that users have to manually update them, provided that they indeed have access to the routers to perform the update and that the vendor has issued a patch.

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HEADLINE	<b>01/19 Suspicious vaccine-related domains triple</b>
SOURCE	<a href="https://www.infosecurity-magazine.com/news/suspicious-vaccine-related-domains/">https://www.infosecurity-magazine.com/news/suspicious-vaccine-related-domains/</a>
GIST	<p>The number of suspicious domains that feature the word "vaccine" in their title increased by almost 100% in the month after the first Pfizer COVID-19 vaccine was given outside of a clinical trial.</p> <p>British grandmother Margaret Keenan became the first person in the world to receive the vaccine on December 8, 2020, a week before her 91st birthday.</p> <p>New research by American cybersecurity software company Webroot observed that December 8 through January 6, there was an 94.8% increase in suspicious domain names using "vaccine" compared with the previous 30 days.</p> <p>When compared with the month of March 2020, the total use of the word "vaccine" within suspicious domain names between December and January 6 was found to have increased by 336%.</p>

“As 2021 brings the first mass vaccination programs to fight COVID-19, we’re already seeing cybercriminals exploiting the publicity and anticipation surrounding these to target businesses and consumers in phishing and domain spoofing attacks,” said Nick Emanuel, senior director of product at Webroot.

"Scams using keywords based on emotive subjects concerning medical safety and the pandemic are always going to be more effective, especially when they're in the public interest."

Webroot's Real-Time Anti-Phishing protection system detected a rise in malicious URLs using other words related to the pandemic.

Over 4,500 new suspicious domains were found, which contained a combination of words relating to "COVID-19," "Corona," "Vaccine," "Cure COVID," and others.

The word "vaccine" was specifically included in the title of 934 domains, while misspellings of "vaccine" cropped up in 611 more.

"COVID" was in the title of 2,295 suspicious domains, and "Test" or "Testing" appeared in the title of 622 domains.

Threat actors also appeared to be using public interest in travel restrictions as a phishing lure. Among the suspicious domain titles flagged by researchers were "COVID Validator," "Testing Update," "COVID Travelcard," and "Private Vaccine."

"For individuals, defending against these kinds of attacks should involve security awareness training and remaining vigilant in scrutinising the types of emails they receive," said Emanuel.

"This should also be underpinned by cybersecurity technology such as email filtering, anti-virus protection, and strong password policies."

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HEADLINE	<b>01/19 MAZE exfiltration tactic widely adopted</b>
SOURCE	<a href="https://www.infosecurity-magazine.com/news/maze-exfiltration-tactic-widely/">https://www.infosecurity-magazine.com/news/maze-exfiltration-tactic-widely/</a>
GIST	<p>New research by New Zealand company Emsisoft has found that a cyber-blackmail tactic first debuted by ransomware gang MAZE has been adopted by over a dozen other criminal cyber-gangs.</p> <p>The internationally renowned security software company declared a ransomware crisis in the last month of 2019. Their latest ransomware report shows that this particular type of malware has had a huge impact on the United States in 2020.</p> <p>Emsisoft threat analyst Brett Callow described the numbers in "The State of Ransomware in the US: Report and Statistics 2020" as "pretty grim."</p> <p>At least 2,354 US governments, healthcare facilities, and schools were impacted by ransomware last year, including 113 federal, state, and municipal governments and agencies, 560 healthcare facilities, and 1,681 schools, colleges, and universities.</p> <p>Researchers noted that the attacks "caused significant, and sometimes life-threatening, disruption: ambulances carrying emergency patients had to be redirected, cancer treatments were delayed, lab test results were inaccessible, hospital employees were furloughed and 911 services were interrupted."</p> <p>In 2020, MAZE became the first ransomware group to be observed exfiltrating data from its victims and using the threat of publication as additional leverage to extort payment.</p>

	<p>"At the beginning of 2020, only the Maze group used this tactic," wrote researchers. "By the end of the year, at least 17 others had adopted it and were publishing stolen data on so-called leak sites."</p> <p>According to a November report by Coveware, some ransomware gangs that exfiltrate data don't delete it, even after receiving a ransom from their victims. Coveware observed REvil (Sodinokibi) asking for a second ransom payment for stolen data it had already been paid to erase.</p> <p>Netwalker (Mailto) and Mespinoza (Pysa) were observed publishing exfiltrated data on dedicated leak-site portals despite receiving ransoms from their victims.</p> <p>Emsisoft found that in 2019 and in 2020, the same number of federal, state, county, and municipal governments and agencies were impacted by ransomware (113).</p> <p>"Of the 60 incidents that occurred in Q1 and Q2, data was stolen and released in only one case; it was, however, stolen and released in 23 of the 53 incidents that occurred in Q3 and Q4," they wrote.</p>
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<b>HEADLINE</b>	<b>01/20 Coin-mining malware volume soars</b>
<b>SOURCE</b>	<a href="https://www.infosecurity-magazine.com/news/coinmining-malware-volumes-soar-53/">https://www.infosecurity-magazine.com/news/coinmining-malware-volumes-soar-53/</a>
<b>GIST</b>	<p>Detections of crypto-mining malware surged by 53% quarter-on-quarter in the final three months of 2020 as the value of Bitcoin soared, according to Avira.</p> <p>The price of one Bitcoin now stands at over \$35,500, close to an all-time-high it hit earlier this month, according to the security vendor's Avira Protection Labs.</p> <p>"The rapid increase in coin-miner malware suggests that malware authors are taking advantage of the price trend in recent months and increasingly spreading malware that aims to exploit other people's computer resources for illegal mining activities," argued Alexander Vukcevic, director of Avira Protection Labs.</p> <p>"This correlation is not surprising but is nevertheless worrying for legitimate miners and investors."</p> <p>Crypto-mining or crypto-jacking came of age in 2017 and 2018 as cyber-criminals sought a quick and easy way to monetize attacks. It was claimed at the time that because attacks didn't require user interaction to start generating profits for the perpetrator, many would-be ransomware groups were pivoting to the new threat.</p> <p>Avira listed three main types of coin-mining malware today: executable files, browser-based cryptocurrency miners and advanced fileless miners.</p> <p>It was the browser-based Coinhive that drove the previous spike in cryptocurrency-mining activity. By February 2018 it had impacted 23% of global organizations, according to one study. One researcher even found it installed on UK and US government sites including those belonging to the UK's Information Commissioner's Office (ICO), United States Courts, the General Medical Council, the UK's Student Loans Company and NHS Inform.</p> <p>Coinhive shut down in February 2019, but the practice appears to be spiking again alongside the value of digital currency.</p> <p>Chris Sedgwick, security operations director, Sy4Security, argued that it is the lesser-known Monero currency rather than Bitcoin that's in high demand.</p> <p>"The reason why the majority of cryptocurrency malware mines Monero instead of Bitcoin is that the mining requirements for Monero is a fraction of that required for Bitcoin," he said.</p>



	“Monero is also favored over Bitcoin amongst those individuals looking to use their gains for illegal use as there is no tracking of transactions and the Blockchain is not transparent.”
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HEADLINE	<b>01/19 Interpol: fraudsters target dating app users</b>
SOURCE	<a href="https://www.bleepingcomputer.com/news/security/interpol-trading-scammers-lure-love-struck-victims-via-dating-apps/">https://www.bleepingcomputer.com/news/security/interpol-trading-scammers-lure-love-struck-victims-via-dating-apps/</a>
GIST	<p>The Interpol (International Criminal Police Organisation) warns of fraudsters targeting dating app users and attempting to trick them into investing through fake trading apps.</p> <p>The warning was issued to all 194 member states as a Purple Notice after Interpol's Financial Crimes Unit has received reports of people around the world falling victim to this scam.</p> <p>Such fraud attempts have become increasingly easier to pull off since a lot of people have switched to online dating and interactions since the start of the COVID-19 pandemic.</p> <p><b>Victims tricked into installing fake trading apps</b></p> <p>"The threat involves taking advantage of people's vulnerabilities as they look for potential matches, and luring them into a sophisticated fraud scheme," the Interpol said.</p> <p>"In the initial stages, an artificial romance is established via a dating app. Once communication becomes regular and a certain level of trust is established, criminals share investment tips with their victims and encourage them to join a scheme."</p> <p>The victims are then encouraged by the scammers to download and open an account on a trading app so that they can reach Gold or VIP status after working their way up "the investment chain."</p> <p>Fraudsters coordinating this scheme also act as customer service agents for the fake investment platform "helping" victims to choose products available through sites using domains very similar to legitimate platforms.</p> <p>"One day, however, all contact stops and victims are locked out of the account," the Interpol <a href="#">added</a>. "They're left confused, hurt, and worried that they'll never see their money again."</p> <p>Last year, Interpol also <a href="#">advised</a> victims of online financial scams to immediately take action to intercept the funds before their money reaches the scammers' accounts.</p> <p>This is possible because the victims' bank can request payment cancellation by contacting the fraudsters' bank so that the transaction can be blocked and the money refunded as long as they weren't withdrawn by the scammers.</p> <p>"Many people think that there is nothing that can be done once a victim's money is transferred abroad but there are systems in place to recall fraudulent transactions," Tomonobu Kaya, Interpol Financial Crimes Coordinator, said at the time.</p> <p>"There are systems in place and people to help intercept fraudulent transactions. The key is to call your bank, call the police and – most importantly – act quickly. When it comes to combating online scams and other types of fraud, there is no time to waste."</p>
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HEADLINE	01/19 US airstrikes target al-Shabaab leaders
SOURCE	<a href="https://www.upi.com/Defense-News/2021/01/19/US-airstrikes-kill-3-al-Shabaab-terrorists-in-Somalia/7761611085651/">https://www.upi.com/Defense-News/2021/01/19/US-airstrikes-kill-3-al-Shabaab-terrorists-in-Somalia/7761611085651/</a>
GIST	<p>Jan. 19 (UPI) -- U.S. forces conducted two airstrikes on al-Shabaab operatives in Somalia, killing three members of the Islamist terrorist group, U.S. Africa Command said Tuesday.</p> <p>No civilians were injured or killed in the airstrikes, conducted near Jamaame and Deb Scinnele in coordination with the government of Somalia, according to initial assessment, AFRICOM said <a href="#">in a statement</a>.</p> <p>"These strikes targeted known al-Shabaab leaders involved in IED facilitation, fighter training and attack planning," U.S. Air Force Maj. Gen. Dagvin Anderson said in a statement.</p> <p>"Striking these leaders disrupts al-Shabaab's ability to attack our partners and indiscriminately kill innocent civilians with improvised explosive devices. We are working closely with our Somali partners to support their operations against al-Shabaab, protect their people and provide governance," said Anderson, commander of Joint Task Force-Quartz.</p> <p>An airstrike Monday also destroyed one al-Shabaab compound <a href="#">near Tiyeeglow</a>, AFRICOM said.</p> <p>U.S. Army Gen. Stephen Townsend, commander of AFRICOM, stressed AFRICOM's commitment to Somalia during a <a href="#">multi-day engagement</a> in the country, which included a visit to the amphibious assault ship USS Makin Island.</p> <p>"Al-Shabaab is a brutal enemy and a dangerous threat to America and Africa," Townsend said in an AFRICOM statement. "We continue to work closely with our partners to degrade al-Shabaab's ability to conduct operations and spread violence. America's and Africa's security depends on it."</p> <p>This week's airstrikes were the first since AFRICOM announced it had <a href="#">completed its withdrawal</a> of troops from Somalia by Friday, Stars and Stripes reported.</p> <p>In December, the Pentagon announced U.S. troops would be withdrawn from Somalia by early 2021.</p> <p>Those forces, which have been involved in combating al-Shabaab, training local forces and protecting the Baledogle Airfield in southern Somalia were to be <a href="#">deployed elsewhere</a> in East Africa.</p> <p>The airstrikes are the latest in a series of military operations against al-Shabaab operatives in Somalia.</p> <p>On Jan. 7, five al-Shabaab terrorists were <a href="#">killed in an airstrike</a> near Saaxa Weyne.</p> <p>Three others were killed Jan. 1 in <a href="#">two airstrikes</a> near Qunyo Barrow.</p> <p>In 2020, U.S. forces conducted at least 50 airstrikes against the extremist group, which has sought to overthrow Somalia's U.S.-backed government.</p>
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HEADLINE	01/19 Yemen rebels threaten response to 'label'
SOURCE	<a href="https://www.thesundaily.my/world/yemen-rebels-threaten-response-after-us-terrorist-label-EI6219170">https://www.thesundaily.my/world/yemen-rebels-threaten-response-after-us-terrorist-label-EI6219170</a>
GIST	<p><b>SANAA, Jan 19:</b> Yemen's Huthi rebels, who control much of the north of war-ravaged country, warned Tuesday they would respond to any action against them following their US classification as "terrorists".</p> <p>"We are ready to take all necessary measures against any hostile act," the Iran-backed Huthis said in a statement.</p>

	<p>Outgoing US President Donald Trump’s administration announced the last-ditch move on January 11, with just days to go before his successor Joe Biden takes over.</p> <p>The United Nations and aid groups have warned it risks worsening an already dire humanitarian crisis.</p> <p>Yemen’s war has killed tens of thousands, displaced millions and, according to the UN, left 16 million on the brink of famine.</p> <p>The designation is expected to halt many transactions with Huthi authorities, including bank transfers and payments to medical personnel and for food and fuel, due to fears of US prosecution.</p> <p>In turn, the Huthis called the US “criminal terrorists”.</p> <p>The designation comes on the eve of the inauguration of Biden, whose aides had hoped to mount a fresh push to end Yemen’s six-year war.</p> <p>The Huthis are facing a bloody offensive led by US ally Saudi Arabia, with millions in the country depending on aid to survive.</p>
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HEADLINE	<b>01/19 Incels: isolation, terror designation</b>
SOURCE	<a href="https://www.hstoday.us/subject-matter-areas/counterterrorism/perspective-what-incels-can-tell-us-about-isolation-resentment-and-terrorism-designations/">https://www.hstoday.us/subject-matter-areas/counterterrorism/perspective-what-incels-can-tell-us-about-isolation-resentment-and-terrorism-designations/</a>
GIST	<p><a href="#">Incels</a>, a portmanteau of “involuntary celibates,” are primarily men who consider themselves unable to attract a romantic or sexual partner despite their desire for one. In recent years, several high-profile acts of violence linked to the incel community have been the subject of much media coverage and public speculation. Recent research has analyzed incels’ online postings and commentary, but there remains a glaring dearth of primary data collected from direct questioning of incel community members.</p> <p><a href="#">Most incels feel condemned to a life of isolation, loneliness and humiliation.</a> Therefore, self-identifying as an incel revolves around a deficit: the lack of a sexual or romantic relationship, which is often experienced as an immense source of personal frustration and shame. Incels do not want to be incels but identify as such because they perceive that modern society is established hierarchically, in a manner that favors appearance, social status and physical attractiveness and casts out its “low-tier” members. These negative perceptions fuel resentment that, by extension, undergirds a grievance-based worldview centered around a perceived moral wrongdoing inflicted upon them by unfortunate genetics, particular life circumstances and/or an unjust society which empowers some while marginalizing others.</p> <p>The incel worldview is typified by hostility toward women and, at times, sexually active men. Incels are also often considered part of <a href="#">“the manosphere,”</a> a conglomeration of online spaces (forums, blogs, magazines) related to masculinity and men’s issues, which has been referred to as “the most extreme corner of the misogynistic spectrum.” Other men’s groups that form part of the manosphere include MGTOW (Men Going Their Own Way), MRA (Men’s Rights Activists), and PUAs (Pick-up Artists).</p> <p><a href="#">According to the current literature</a>, over the past five years in North America, there have been nine attacks, claiming over 50 lives, attributed to perpetrators purportedly motivated by the incel ideology. In examining such crimes and their antecedents, scholars of extremism have compared incel ideology, social mobilization, and online activity to the <a href="#">“tools that have propelled the Islamic State and violent far-right extremists to increasing prominence and attention.”</a> This perception of incels is not limited to the academic sphere. In 2019, <a href="#">the Canadian Security Intelligence Service (CSIS)</a> classified incelism as a type of Ideologically Motivated Violent Extremism. Moreover, in January of 2020, the <a href="#">State of Texas Department of Public Safety</a> generated a report which listed incels as an emerging domestic terrorism threat, “as current adherents demonstrated marked acts or threats of violence in furtherance of their social grievance”;</p>

the report included incel-related violence as an example of “single issue domestic terrorism.” These designations include new legislation, policy, and surveillance recommendations.

Since these reports were issued, [three additional attacks have been attributed to incels](#). The third attack, [a stabbing on Feb. 24, 2020](#), led to an unprecedented legal decision by the Canadian Royal Mounted Police to [charge the 17-year-old perpetrator with terrorism offenses](#), a charge that had hitherto only been applied to members of the Islamic State or al-Qaeda.

The Canadian terrorism designation prompted even more criticism of incels, both in the media and among terrorism researchers, thus making incels the focus of even more scrutiny. For example, a widely shared op-ed published a day after the terrorism designation by a former Canadian Security Intelligence Service analyst titled [Incel-related Violence is Terrorism – and the World Should Start Treating it that Way](#) posited that “successfully prosecuting incel violence as terrorism – and it remains to be seen how this particular case will play out – will send an important signal to the broader incel community and set an important precedent internationally.” A wave of similar articles followed, yet the fact remains that a very low base rate of those deeply embedded in the incel community has radicalized to violence (if any at all), and there remains no clear evidence of either a coherent ideology or organized support among incels for such violence, as is typically the case in terrorist groups or violent extremist movements.

While interest in the “incelosphere” has intensified over the past few years, rigorous research has not sought to grapple with the antecedent conditions of this self-described life situation or with potential long-term consequences of living with this identification, whether as a result of the social alienation experienced by many incels, or of extended immersion in the contemporary [incel subculture](#), which exists almost entirely online. Instead, existing research is primarily concerned with the relationship between inceldom and violence without careful examination of the underlying issues and perceived grievances that help solidify the community.

As people around the world have endured the COVID-19 pandemic, many have questioned what [impact quarantine will have on extremist movements](#), with worry that frustration and social alienation would create conditions wherein more youth in particular respond to online extremist recruitment. As one terrorism researcher put it, [“the first six months of 2020 will be a ‘watershed’ moment for these movements of angry young men as they are spending more time online amid lockdowns.”](#) As a group sharing a common anti-feminist grievance and often referenced as an extremist outlet, many have posited that incels might be particularly affected by quarantine, that their existing psychological symptoms, such as depression or anxiety, may become exacerbated, that increased time online might enhance group polarization and resentment and thereby lead to a greater willingness to endorse violence. A counter hypothesis is that incels are already used to social isolation, that no change would be expected, and that incels might see quarantine as creating a more “level playing field,” causing the rest of the world to experience the limited day-to-day social interactions incels experience regularly.

To explore these questions, members of [www.incels.co](#), the largest online forum for incels, were sent a survey by the forum’s administrator, starting on Aug. 1 and ending on Aug. 8, 2020. Included in the survey were questions about whether the COVID-19 quarantine made them “more” or “less” isolated or “no difference,” and whether the COVID-19 quarantine made them “more” or “less” resentful or “no difference.” The survey also inquired about incels’ isolation and resentment as a result of the Canadian government’s designation of incel-related crimes as terrorism. For each question, participants were also asked “why and how so.” The study offers some of the first primary data collected from direct surveying of incels.

In response to the first question about whether the COVID-19 quarantine made them feel more or less isolated, the majority (61.2%) of the 422 survey respondents said that they felt no change in their isolation as a result of the COVID-19 quarantine supporting the counter hypothesis. Most of the remaining respondents (34.6%) said that the quarantine made them feel more isolated, while only 4.2% said they felt less isolated. These answers are unsurprising, given that although most people would likely feel more isolated by the quarantine, incels define themselves in part in relation to their feelings of isolation.

When asked whether the COVID-19 quarantine increased their feelings of resentment, a slightly smaller majority than the previous question (54.1%) said they experienced no change in their feelings of resentment as a result of quarantine. Beyond that, 30.2% said they felt more resentful, but a meaningful 15.7% of the 422 survey respondents reported feeling less resentful, with many reporting a decrease because others were experiencing their normal life circumstance. Therefore, quarantine does not seem to have altered sentiments of isolation or resentment much.

Respondents' qualitative responses to the first question shed additional light on the matter. One participant wrote, "I had no social life anyway, so nothing really changed." Another explained, "I was already isolated before quarantine." There was more variation in their feelings of resentment, however, with many reporting being resentful of those complaining about forced isolation: "Seeing normies [non-incels] complain about being inside temporarily when I've been forced into seclusion my whole life makes me angry. They can't social distance for a few months, yet I've been forced to do so all my teenage years?" Another wrote that he was made resentful in "seeing people go through what I went through (for 6 years and counting) for 3 months and complain." One participant, who said he became less isolated because of his increased online interactions and whose use of the term "neurotypical" suggests that he may experience some features of autism, wrote, "I chose 'more resentful' for the second due to nerotypical [sic] types constantly complaining about the 'lack of socialization' because of the quarantine. For them it's just a transitional thing and when this all mellows out they'll go back to socializing and experiencing intimacy while I continue to rot. I've got a whole life of quarantine awaiting me and for the average nerotypical [sic] this is just a minor inconvenience if that makes any sense [sic]."

Others became more resentful not through their perceptions of others' reactions to isolation, but through their own increased isolation. Wrote one survey respondent, "There is no change in isolation. I'm more resentful because I had more time to think about my shitty life." Another wrote that his increased isolation contributed to his increased resentment, "because my life routine has been fucked up I couldn't even go to gym for 4 months my goals are fucked up and I feel like I'm not doing anything to improve my life [sic]."

Still, some of those respondents who reported that they became less resentful as a result of the quarantine also referenced feeling some sense of comfort in seeing others experience the same isolation they had been experiencing for years. Wrote one, "Some people kind of started to understand my lifestyle, which is always nice to see." Another respondent wrote, "Isolated because of lockdown; less resentful because everyone else is just as physically isolated." Still another, in contrast, referenced his continued isolation as a source of personal growth, leading to decreased resentment: "Quarantine has gave me time to reflect on my life. I've never had this much free time in my adult life, and I'm glad I spend even a little bit of it changing in a positive way [sic]."

Given the findings of question one, it is interesting to examine how isolation and resentment changed with regard to the Canadian terrorism designation, subsequent media coverage and public scrutiny. Results for the second question suggest that the terrorism designation had a similar impact on incels' isolation as quarantine, with 63.1% reporting no change in their feelings of isolation, 33.9% reporting feeling more isolated, and 2.3% reporting feeling less isolated. In contrast, incels' resentment was far more impacted by the terrorism designation. While 47.5% said that their resentment did not change, 50.8% said their resentment increased and only 1.7% said they became less resentful. The increased resentment for over half of respondents to the question of the terrorism designation is substantially higher than the other three variables (which average 30%).

While it might seem unsurprising that individuals would be resentful of being labeled terrorists, it is important to highlight that the general concern among journalists, academics and intelligence agencies for incel radicalization under conditions of quarantine has not been matched by a similar concern for the potential adverse consequences associated with labeling incels as a terrorist community absent empirical evidence. In fact, [only three incel-affiliated perpetrators have been designated as primarily driven by their inceldom](#), a reality that has [not gone unnoticed by the incel community](#). The concern is that enhanced resentment as a result of the terrorism designation may actually inadvertently propel incel radicalization.



This is evident in the qualitative responses. Some survey respondents explained that the lack of change in their resentment was due to prior feelings of exclusion from society, saying, “Everyone already thinks we are scum. The designation changes little.” Still, others simply explained that they “don’t care what normies [non-incels] think,” or that they felt the designation would not impact them directly: “I don’t exactly have ‘incel’ written over my face, so people didn’t start treating me any worse. And until I actually start having problems from incels being labeled as terrorists, it’s unlikely that I would care much about it.”

Yet, those whose resentment did increase felt that they were being demonized based on the actions of very few, or that those who made the designation did not make the effort to become informed about the community as a whole. Wrote one respondent, “It made me feel more resentful because people refuse to try understanding our group and instead focus on cherrypicking the hyper-aggressive mad ones and obvious trolls. Biases create resentment, making an attempt at understanding should be the key.” Another agreed, “Because some idiots went on a killing spree everyone thinks all of us are rampaging idiots.” Still another articulated, “I feel as if the people that assume all incels are ‘terrorists and literally advocate for the genocide of women’ have completely no idea what it’s like to have feelings of inadequacy, feeling like you still haven’t emotionally matured because you’ve missed out on an important aspect of life, becoming isolated beyond the 10th degree for a majority of your life, and feeling like you’re at the absolute bottom of society. I have the right to be upset and angry, and I have the right to vent my frustration on the internet freely and anonymously, and I should have that right without being labeled as a terrorist.”

Other survey respondents who felt more resentful were similar to those whose resentment did not change, in that they felt that their status as incel was hidden. However, these men felt that instead of not being directly impacted by the designation, their ability to be open about their feelings was damaged. Wrote one respondent, “It makes me afraid to be honest about my inceldom and feelings to people so there are less people I can feel truly connected with.” Another explained: “I remain inconspicuous of my status as an incel, so no one knows that side of me. Although it makes me resentful, because as media demonizes incels further and further, normies will start to treat us even worse. Not only that, but I can see all kinds of bad consequences happening to someone who has been outed as an incel in the future.”

The results of these survey questions are revealing. First, whereas some [terrorist and violent extremist ideologies and organizations have flourished due to increased isolation](#), preexisting isolation and high levels of online activity prior to the COVID-19 quarantine amongst incels likely did not impact them to the same extent. It is important to note that some respondents even said that they found themselves having more time to reflect during quarantine, and that they felt others may now have a better understanding of inceldom after having experienced isolation themselves.

Second, it is clear that the terrorism designation and subsequently enhanced public scrutiny had a much higher impact on incel resentment over the recent period than did quarantine and isolation. It must be stressed that [radicalization into violence remains a low base rate phenomenon](#) – a product of there being [very few actual terrorists relative to the number of those radicalized](#). Nevertheless, there has been a tendency to pay a [disproportionate amount of attention to the violent-extremist few, rather than to investigate how or why the vast majority of similar others did not become \(violent\) extremists](#). Low base rate bias may [exaggerate assessments of the likelihood of extremists engaging in violent terrorist activity](#), which can produce [counter-effective consequences including in assessing risk amongst intelligence professionals](#), or in countering violent extremism (CVE) initiatives, which have been [criticized in the past for stigmatizing and securitizing relations with entire communities \(e.g. Muslims\)](#), for example [by restricting nonviolent alternative spaces to air grievances and thus inducing lone actors to believe they have no recourse other than violence](#). Such circumstances can [unintentionally facilitate greater rates of radicalization and violent extremism](#), cement a [victim mentality that enhances in-group/out-group bias](#), which can lead to a [reciprocal dehumanization](#) of out-group members from amongst collectives that feel [stigmatized](#), or that may be used to justify the turn to violence for potential extremist actors. Ergo, second-order consequences of labeling a diverse and largely nonviolent group as “terrorist” premised only upon a cognitive or rhetorical affinity may backfire.

Third, the sheer number of incels who responded to the survey suggests a vast willingness to engage with researchers (and perhaps the general public) to enhance the world’s understanding of incels and inceldom.



	<p>Thus, additional primary research should seek to grasp the unique conditions of incelism before investigating how an extremely fringe subset of incels allegedly engaged with the community and/or ideology turns to violence. It might be that engagement with incel fora online serves as a support group of sorts that reduces the likelihood lonely, frustrated young men engage in violence. Understanding why the vast majority do not engage in violence may provide insight crucial to reducing the number of incels considered at-risk and therefore worthy of law enforcement monitoring. Additionally, such efforts may inform evidence-based CVE-interventions that can reduce some of the risk factors associated with incel radicalization.</p> <p>On the aggregate, incels seek understanding; they are willing to engage and interact with nonjudgmental researchers, they are willing to convey their grievances to broader society and most importantly they feel the threat of terrorist violence coming from their community is exaggerated. This is a far cry from the stance of well-established violent extremist collectives. We should recognize that, while a threat from the community seems to exist, we must refrain from labeling incels as terrorists in general absent sufficient evidence. In conclusion, in the service of security as well as the mental and emotional wellbeing of thousands of self-identifying incels, it is imperative to try to understand these individuals and to do what is possible to help them improve their lives as a means of reducing the risks of incel harm to self or others.</p>
<a href="#">Return to Top</a>	<p>Read a full report on this survey <a href="#">here</a>.</p>

HEADLINE	<b>01/19 Emergence domestic extremist threat</b>
SOURCE	<a href="https://www.hstoday.us/subject-matter-areas/infrastructure-security/how-the-heightened-domestic-extremist-threat-could-materialize-in-attacks/">https://www.hstoday.us/subject-matter-areas/infrastructure-security/how-the-heightened-domestic-extremist-threat-could-materialize-in-attacks/</a>
GIST	<p>“The storm is upon us, we are prepared for the days of darkness,” declared one recent tweet in a stream of self-identified QAnon adherents. “They wants to stop Patriots? Nothing can stop what is coming,” stated another. “They wont be able to walk down the streets or any where else,” another said of declared foes.</p> <p>The nation’s capital was heavily locked down for the presidential inauguration after the Jan. 6 attack on the U.S. Capitol sparked hundreds of investigations and fears that any of the participating groups or movements could attempt to use the date or location of the swearing in of our new president to launch new attacks. The mishmash of extremists at the Capitol and heavy chatter preceding and following the attack rightfully have law enforcement on edge – not just through Jan. 20, but in the year ahead as emboldened and inspired militia groups, accelerationists, white supremacists, conspiracy theory extremists, anti-government extremists and more take their own unique cues from the insurrection and potentially decide to make their own terrorist statements through new or copycat attacks.</p> <p>In a sea of bellicose online threats, the challenge is finding those that may be put into action within the aspirational, knowing that post-inauguration domestic threats will likely follow some patterns.</p> <p><b>Inspiration from the Jan. 6 Attack</b></p> <p>There’s a good reason why ISIS became masters of propaganda, utilizing multiple platforms, mediums, languages and styles to reach their target audience, and there’s an even better reason why much of that propaganda has been saturated with glorification of past attacks, pictures of “martyrs” who died fighting for the terror group, and trumpeting of perceived wrongs to whip up the base into a frenzy. By quickly seizing on successful attacks like Paris 2015 or Orlando 2016 – even, for a time, purposely wrongly claiming the 2017 Las Vegas mass shooting as their own – ISIS reached out to adherents far and wide with a full-court press, including flowery prose and beauty shots of the terrorists and pictures of the carnage, to inspire others to commit similar successful attacks. On the flip side, unsuccessful attacks by those claiming loyalty to ISIS receive scant, if any, praise or recognition in both official and unofficial media channels of the terror group.</p> <p>The attack on the Capitol was viewed as a success not just for insurrectionists hellbent on stopping the counting of electoral votes in that moment but for accelerationists who embrace this sort of violence as a way to hasten the fall of our government. Many of those who stormed the building filmed their actions and</p>

bragged about it on social media, to the delight of their ideological brethren. Memes and imagery advocating retribution and further insurgency quickly sprung up declaring QAnon adherent Ashli Babbitt a “martyr” after she was fatally shot by police as she climbed through the broken pane of a door inside the Capitol. Some of these are also referencing the March shooting of Boogaloo adherent Duncan Lemp or comparing it to the Ruby Ridge standoff. Some called for a “Million Martyr March” in D.C., and her image is being used on [white supremacist and anti-Semitic propaganda](#).

Bringing to justice those involved in the Capitol riot could also be used by extremists in the defendants’ hometowns as justification for at the very least protests and possibly new attacks. As the Justice Department recently [explained](#), many of those who have been identified, located and arrested have been initially charged with trespassing offenses but could have more serious charges added on as multifaceted investigations proceed. This retribution could manifest in general attacks on possibly symbolic targets while invoking names of higher-profile defendants from Jan. 6, or more targeted attacks on the judicial facilities or personnel involved in prosecuting these suspects.

### **Symbolic Dates**

A scroll through QAnon accounts this past weekend revealed anticipation – tied up with conspiratorial links – for something big to happen the day before the inauguration. Jan. 19 is National Popcorn Day, and some accounts featured an emoji of popcorn among other memes related to “the storm” for which Q believers are hoping. Along with popcorn symbolizing they believe something of significance is on the horizon – worth watching, worth popping popcorn to “enjoy the show” – adherents were also noting that 1/19 is “911 backwards” and resurrected screenshots of a message saying “remember THIS DAY” attributed to their elusive “Q” dated 1/19/2018, and another dated 1/19/20 declaring “THE GREAT AWAKENING.”

The reach for symbolic dates – or opportunistically seizing on events or anniversaries – is a consistent theme among extremists who want the date of an attack to hold special meaning for their followers and/or their victims. As QAnon numerology gymnastics show, it’s not always easy to pinpoint which date or why may be a symbolic choice, but there are some to watch when it comes to domestic extremism. Jan. 6 will always be a special day of infamy for the movements that took part in the insurrection, and you can rest assured that law enforcement will be on the highest alert in the weeks leading up to Jan. 6, 2022. But there are other symbolic dates on which domestic extremists could strike for added effect, such as the anniversaries of the 2015 Charleston church, 2019 Christchurch mosque or 2019 El Paso Walmart mass shootings, or on other days that have been dribbled out by various conspiracy theories.

### **Insider Attacks**

A dream of any extremist movement is to recruit and inspire persons who have access to targeted locations, infrastructure or individuals. They want to recruit the person with a security clearance, with training pertinent to conventional or CBRN attacks, and who enjoys a degree of trust in his or her career community. The 2009 Fort Hood attack and the 2019 Naval Air Station Pensacola shooting are two deadly examples of insider threats.

Maj. Gen. William Walker, who commands the D.C. National Guard, [confirmed](#) that the FBI was assisting in enhanced screening of thousands of members brought to help protect Capitol Hill during inauguration week. “It’s all about the background,” he said. “So, a regular background check is enhanced with more screening, more details and it’s layered so the FBI is part of it, the Secret Service is part of it and once they are certain that there’s no insider threat then that soldier, guardsman or airman is given a credential.” The Associated Press [reported](#) today that 12 members of the National Guard were removed from inauguration security due to right-wing militia ties or posting/texting extremist views about the inaugural event. Additionally, the FBI has [warned](#) law enforcement agencies of far-right extremists discussing how they might gain access posing as National Guard members.

Some extremists across ideologies who have launched attacks were utilizing skills they learned at some point in the military. Detecting potential domestic extremist insider threats in active-duty military is its own challenge: more than a third of those polled in a 2019 [Military Times survey](#) said they had personally witnessed examples of white nationalism or ideological-driven racism within the ranks. With current and

former service members among those under investigation for the Capitol riot, a senior defense official [told reporters](#) last week that “we clearly recognize the threat from domestic extremists, particularly those who espouse white supremacist or white nationalist ideologies,” and “know that some groups actively attempt to recruit our personnel into their cause, or actually encourage their members to join the military for [the] purpose of acquiring skills and experience.”

### **Group vs. Lone Attacks**

In recent years, we’ve become accustomed to seeing operations conducted by the lone, inspired terrorist who can be more difficult to intercept in the attack planning stages. Yet the more that domestic extremist movements encourage “revolutionary”-caliber attacks, the more likely they are going to try to show strength through numbers or utilize extra conspirators for more complex attacks. In the [alleged plot](#) of the “Wolverine Watchmen” to kidnap Michigan’s governor, the FBI said one of the militia extremists predicted that they could inspire other operations by self-styled militias: “I can see several states takin’ their f\*ckin’ tyrants. Everybody takes their tyrants.”

The Jan. 13 Joint Intelligence Bulletin from the FBI, DHS and NCTC referred to the domestic violent extremist population as “loosely organized, sustained, and significant,” bound by false narratives that the election was “stolen” and by their shared political opposition. It also noted that the mingling of various movements – including militia and anti-government extremists, white supremacists and neo-Nazis, and conspiracy theory extremists – at the Capitol riot “likely served to foster connections” that could increase extremists “willingness, capability, and motivation to attack.”

Simply put, extremists will set aside differences in specific ideology or tactics when they see benefit in uniting against a common foe. This doesn’t mean that disparate movements will necessarily join forces to plan and conduct kinetic attacks, but they won’t stand in each other’s way and may even provide assistance along the lines of online propaganda and recruitment as well as attack help – and they’ll find inspiration in the actions of other groups, particularly in their successes.

### **Critical Infrastructure Threats**

The most recent plots, threats, and chatter about attacking power substations and similar critical infrastructure have largely come from neo-Nazis such as the former Atomwaffen Division and The Base. But there is [history](#) of militia targeting the power grid and components often regarded as soft targets – as seen in 2013 when multiple gunmen opened fire on the Pacific Gas and Electric Company’s Metcalf Transmission Substation south of San Jose, Calif., causing more than \$15 million in damage to 17 transformers. DHS warned telecom companies in May that “conspiracy theories linking the spread of COVID-19 to the expansion of the 5G cellular network are inciting attacks against the communications infrastructure globally” and “these threats probably will increase as the disease continues to spread, including calls for violence against telecommunications workers.”

There has also been recent piqued interest among conspiracy theorists about the Department of Homeland Security’s efforts to prepare for the potential of a catastrophic electromagnetic pulse (EMP) event, including interagency cooperation and a [planned exercise](#). A Defense Department blackout simulation in 2017 [stoked conspiracy theorists](#) who twisted the routine critical infrastructure exercise into an Antifa plot.

### **COVID Measures Backlash**

The incoming administration has already announced that it will ramp up vaccine distribution and mandate the wearing of masks on federal property. The same inclinations that drove the “Wolverine Watchmen” to allegedly foment the Michigan kidnapping plot – anger over perceived government overreach saturated with disbelief in the severity of the pandemic – were present at the Jan. 6 rally and riot where participants were actively encouraged to not wear masks. CDC Director Robert Redfield predicted that in addition to the death and destruction at the Capitol the events are “going to have public health consequences” as “you had largely unmasked individuals in a non-distanced fashion, who were all through the Capitol” and then flew or drove back to their hometowns.

Setting that biothreat aside, the extremists who were motivated to attack the Capitol by narratives of perceived government overreach and conspiracy theories could harbor similar plans of violence for

vaccination campaigns and those involved in COVID mitigation efforts. This past spring, the suspect in a disrupted plot against a Missouri hospital allegedly wanted to “attack high value targets if the government issued martial law and quarantine orders as a result of COVID-19.” We’ve seen threats of violence against public health officials including National Institute of Allergy and Infectious Diseases Director Dr. Anthony Fauci, who will be taking on an enhanced advisory role in the Biden administration. Threats could extend to potential soft targets including pharmacies, mass vaccination sites, healthcare centers, and local health departments, which should take any remote threats or on-site protests seriously and have security measures in place before they’ve even personally received any sort of threats.

### **Threats Against Tech Companies**

A Google building in Mountain View, Calif., was evacuated Friday as police responded to examine a suspicious package. It turned out to not be dangerous, but the abundance of caution is absolutely warranted given that Google, Apple, and Amazon suspended Parler, the far-right social networking site designed as a substitute for Twitter, after the Capitol riot. The Atomwaffen Division once [depicted](#) the beheading of Facebook chief Mark Zuckerberg in a gory propaganda poster inciting followers to “delete technocrats”; in recent days, much of the propaganda seen in domestic extremist circles expresses fury about users – including President Trump – being deplatformed by tech companies, and the FBI is concerned that the migration of these users to new online homes may leave law enforcement scrambling to track their chatter. But it could also leave the companies – Microsoft included as conspiracy theorists fixate on Bill Gates in the COVID crisis, convinced he’s trying to microchip people through vaccinations – and associated offices or storefronts vulnerable to cyber or physical attacks from extremists seeking retribution or policy changes.

### **Threats to a New Administration**

Driven by a belief that the Biden administration is not legitimate and further riled up by the enactment or fear of policies or legislation seen as infringing on their rights, extremists could target their attacks against members of the administration serving in even noncontroversial roles. As policies are rolled out, extremists could also hit federal government property that may otherwise seem to be a completely inoffensive target – for example, the 40-day occupation of the Malheur National Wildfire Refuge in Oregon by anti-government extremists in 2016.

### **Retribution Against Law Enforcement and Media**

Islamist terrorists save the most vitriol for counterextremist professionals who are also Muslim. White supremacists harbor special hate for white counterextremists. And the violence exhibited toward police officers at the Capitol – from the death of Capitol Police Officer Brian Sicknick after being struck with a fire extinguisher to the mob beating and tasing D.C. Police Officer Michael Fanone while shouting “kill him with his own gun” – was light years away from the “back the blue” stance that many of the rioters previously purported to take. Extremists feel special fury for the counterextremists who they believe should be on their side.

Indeed, some off-duty cops have been charged with participating in the riots, and several officers on duty that day are being investigated to determine whether they assisted the attackers. Because of the heroes who did stand up to the mob that day, though, many extremists will likely be inspired to specifically target law enforcement. Extremists are also likely infuriated by the post-riot statements of those heroes, including D.C. Police Officer Daniel Hodges, seen pinned and crushed in a door as the mob attacked him in one of the horrifying videos from that day: “If it wasn’t my job, I would have done that for free,” Hodges told NBC Washington. “It was absolutely my pleasure to crush a white nationalist insurrection. I’m glad I was in a position to be able to help. We’ll do it as many times as it takes.”

While the media have long been targets of domestic extremists, such as the pipe bombs mailed to media outlets and personalities by Cesar Sayoc in 2018, the Joint Intelligence Bulletin noted that the words “murder the media” were found scratched into a Capitol door after the riot. While journalists on the ground at Donald Trump’s events have routinely been harassed or taunted, several who covered the riot were assaulted or had cameras smashed – an unprecedented and especially unnerving escalation of violence against the press, [Poynter](#) noted. The JIB also predicted an “increased and prolonged” threat against the media “due to perceived complicity in a system hostile” to the extremists’ beliefs.

## Traditional Domestic Violent Extremist Targets

When extremists find unity of purpose and inspiration to act on their beliefs, they will also channel that energy into pursuing their traditional targets, whether by intention or opportunistically. The Joint Intelligence Bulletin stressed that emboldened domestic extremists are expected to carry out violence either alone or as a group toward racial, ethnic, and religious minorities as well as LGBTQ individuals or associated institutions. All told, these diverse threat actors “will very likely pose the greatest domestic terrorism threats of 2021,” according to the Joint Intelligence Bulletin, and domestic extremists could respond with violence to policy shifts on issues such as gun control, immigration, and the use of public lands.

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HEADLINE	01/19 Neo-Nazi leader in Russia looks to the US
SOURCE	<a href="https://www.vice.com/en/article/3anj8w/russia-based-neo-nazi-terror-leader-offers-training-to-american-far-right">https://www.vice.com/en/article/3anj8w/russia-based-neo-nazi-terror-leader-offers-training-to-american-far-right</a>
GIST	<p>Amid a raging backdrop of far-right violence in the U.S., the Russia-based former leader and founder of a neo-Nazi terror group has turned his attentions to a new project: re-establishing secretive paramilitary training across the U.S.</p> <p><a href="#">News</a></p> <p>Rinaldo Nazzaro, 47, a former Pentagon contractor originally from New Jersey who is said to have worked on targeting operations with <a href="#">U.S. Special Forces</a>, founded and led <a href="#">the Base</a> until a nationwide FBI crackdown dismantled the organization and close to a dozen of its members were arrested for, among other things, an assassination plot and planning a mass shooting. While <a href="#">some of those members</a> languish in jail, Nazzaro’s new training project is designed for a “system collapse”—neo-Nazi lingo for a potential second civil war—and seeks to unite local cells into a national patchwork of future combatants.</p> <p>“To fulfill our political aspirations, we are relying upon the gradual emergence of lawless regions, within the United States, where federal authorities are unable or unwilling to restore law [and] order,” said Nazzaro in a post on Telegram, the encrypted messaging app popular among terrorist organizations and extremists.</p> <p>Nazzaro claims he is now on an American no-fly list, and is believed to be trying to coordinate this online and covert network of trainers and recruits to do work in firearms, battle drills, urban reconnaissance, and other paramilitary skills—even offering to pay for local training, inside the U.S.— from St. Petersburg, Russia.</p> <p>Nazzaro did not respond to a request for comment.</p> <p>The news that a former Pentagon contractor with a high security clearance is actively attempting to train new potential domestic terrorists from Russia is sure to raise concerns in American law enforcement and intelligence circles that are already suspicious of the <a href="#">foreign support of the violent coup attempt on Capitol Hill</a> weeks ago.</p> <p>Though the project’s effectiveness and numbers are unknown, Nazzaro is actively trying to resurrect his ambitions to influence the American far right, even in the face of the spectacular demise of his former organization and those in the neo-Nazi movement questioning his credibility.</p> <p>“We will be forming a cadre of trainers [composed] of at least one lead trainer in each region of America,” said Nazzaro in a Telegram post. If a potential participant of the project needs money for more training, Nazzaro will, he said, “partially subsidize commercial survivalism &amp; self-defense training for one select member of each local group willing to share his new-found knowledge and skills with comrades.”</p>



Nazzaro is framing the project as a legal organization with ambitions to provide survivalist and self-defense training. (Nazzaro [originally advertised the Base](#) in 2018 with much of the same terminology, describing it as a “network” and not a group.)

In a series of personal videos published to Bitchute—a fringe video hosting site—Nazzaro says his project is not intended to have an immediate impact, but to be felt across decades. He provides handbooks on insurgency, paramilitary warfare techniques and a road map to what an American insurgency would look like should the U.S. government fall.

“By no later than the 90 day-mark, plan to go on the offensive by clearing and holding the nearest town. You will commandeer the town and this will serve as your new base of operations,” one post reads, before telling followers there may come a time where they will need to kill American citizens if their insurgency is challenged.

“Any resistors must be dealt with swiftly and somewhat harshly in order to set the tone and establish your authority.

The CIA, FBI, and State Department all declined to comment on the status of Nazzaro and whether or not he is wanted by the U.S. government. Emails to Maria Zakharova, spokesperson for the Russian Foreign Ministry, asking about Nazzaro’s status inside the country also went unanswered.

According to Joshua Fisher-Birch, a terrorism analyst at the [Counter Extremism Project](#), Nazzaro’s latest experiment seems like a rip-off of how he first crafted the Base, which went from being a network to a terror group in a matter of months.

“Nazzaro’s new project is incredibly similar to the stated purpose of the Base, to create cells of white supremacists in the United States and provide them with weapons and survival training while publicly claiming that it’s all for legal self-defense purposes,” he said. “Just like the Base, this new network and or group also poses a threat by trying to bring together neo-Nazis and white supremacists, help them make connections, and increase their lethality.”

For years, members of the Base knew Nazzaro was operating from Russia and joked he was part of the FSB—the prolific Russian intelligence agency known for foreign interference campaigns—suspecting he had orders to meddle with the American political landscape through the terror group.

At one point, members openly wondered how Nazzaro, known to them under the aliases “Roman Wolf” or “Norman Spear,” had so much spare cash. For example, Nazzaro had purchased a multi-acre [property in Washington State](#) that he intended to use as a training compound for the terror group. (Previously, [the BBC reported](#) that he had links to the Kremlin.)

Nazzaro denied allegations he was working for Russian intelligence and against the U.S. “I am not a Russian agent,” Nazzaro told VICE News in response to the allegations in October. “I have never had any contact with Russian law enforcement, military, or intelligence officials.”

Late last year, Nazzaro appeared on a [Kremlin-backed television news special](#) giving a full-throated denial about any claims he was a neo-Nazi terrorist and leader, calling into question [the vast reportage on his now-dead terror group](#), and stating he was simply a family man looking to provide survivalist training to willing Americans.

Fisher-Birch said Nazzaro’s continuing presence in Russia certainly raises questions about his affiliations to intelligence agencies there, which [according to the New York Times](#) looked at the far right as a potential vehicle for sowing chaos in the U.S. before and after the November presidential election.

“It’s also important to note,” he said, “that Nazzaro is presumably attempting to organize this new group while in Russia, which raises questions regarding his status and connections there.”



HEADLINE	<b>01/19 Soldier arrested; attack plot NYC landmark</b>
SOURCE	<a href="https://abcnews.go.com/US/us-soldier-arrested-alleged-plot-attack-nyc-landmark/story?id=75347507">https://abcnews.go.com/US/us-soldier-arrested-alleged-plot-attack-nyc-landmark/story?id=75347507</a>
GIST	<p>An active duty American soldier is in federal custody Tuesday after he allegedly plotted with someone he thought was a member of ISIS to attack a landmark in <a href="#">New York City</a> and fellow troops overseas, according to a law enforcement official.</p> <p>Cole James Bridges, who is stationed at Fort Stewart, is charged with attempting to provide material support to ISIS and attempting to murder U.S. service members.</p> <p>The Ohio native allegedly spoke to an undercover FBI agent when he thought he was planning an ISIS-inspired attack against the <a href="#">9/11</a> Memorial and Museum.</p> <p>Private First Class Cole James Bridges "betrayed the oath he swore" when he tried to supply ISIS with tactical military advice to ambush U.S. troops overseas, federal prosecutors in New York said Tuesday when announcing the criminal charges.</p> <p>"Our troops risk their lives for our country, but they should never face such peril at the hands of one of their own," acting U.S. Attorney Audrey Strauss said.</p> <p>Bridges is charged with giving military advice and guidance on how to kill fellow soldiers to individuals he thought were part of ISIS.</p> <p>"Fortunately, the person with whom he communicated was an FBI employee, and we were able to prevent his evil desires from coming to fruition," FBI Assistant Director Bill Sweeney said.</p> <p>Bridges joined the U.S. Army in 2019 and was assigned as a cavalry scout in the 3rd Infantry Division based in Fort Stewart, Georgia. From the beginning of his service, court records said, Bridges began researching and consuming online propaganda promoting jihadists and their violent ideology. He is accused of expressing support for ISIS and allegedly began his collaboration with an FBI undercover last October.</p> <p>"During these communications, Bridges expressed his frustration with the U.S. military and his desire to aid ISIS," court records said.</p> <p>Bridges is alleged to have provided training and guidance to purported ISIS fighters who were planning attacks, including advice about potential targets in New York City, such as the 9/11 Memorial. He gave the undercover portions of a U.S. Army training manual and guidance about military combat tactics, for use by ISIS, according to the criminal complaint.</p> <p>Earlier this month Bridges gave the undercover a video of himself in body armor standing before a flag often used by ISIS fighters and making a gesture symbolic of support for ISIS. A week later he sent a second video, using a voice manipulator, in which he narrated an ISIS propaganda speech, federal prosecutors said.</p>
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## Suspicious, Unusual

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HEADLINE	<b>01/19 Grant Co. Sheriff's Office: fake deputy</b>
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SOURCE	<a href="https://www.krem.com/article/news/crime/2-people-pose-grant-county-sheriffs-deputy-cps-near-moses-lake/293-58e71675-a23e-4b0f-97e0-76f783fc0af5">https://www.krem.com/article/news/crime/2-people-pose-grant-county-sheriffs-deputy-cps-near-moses-lake/293-58e71675-a23e-4b0f-97e0-76f783fc0af5</a>
GIST	<p>GRANT COUNTY, Wash. — The Grant County Sheriff's Office is warning residents about two people who posed as a deputy and someone from Child Protective Services.</p> <p>A man and woman arrived at a home in the 14000 block of Road 4-Northeast just outside of Moses Lake on Sunday, Jan. 18. They told the homeowner they were from law enforcement and CPS, and asked if they could enter the home to check on the children living there, the sheriff's office said.</p> <p>The homeowner initially allowed the two inside but became suspicious when the woman went back to the car and sat inside. According to the sheriff's office, the homeowner then told the man not to enter the home and warned him that he was going to get his gun.</p> <p>When the homeowner returned, the man and woman were gone, the sheriff's office said.</p> <p>The man identified himself as a Grant County Sheriff's deputy, but there is no record of any law enforcement agency or Child Protective Services representative assigned to a case at that home.</p> <p>It's likely that the two were impersonating officials in order to gain access to the home for "reasons yet unknown," the sheriff's office said, but possibly to lay the groundwork for committing future crimes. <a href="#">In Washington state</a>, first-degree criminal impersonation is a class C felony. This includes pretending to be a public servant and committing an act "in his or her pretended capacity with intent to defraud another or for any other unlawful purpose."</p> <p>The man is described as six feet, two inches tall, having a light brown complex with brown hair in a crew cut, and clean shaven, the sheriff's office said. He was wearing a black polo without any logo, green tactical style pants and black shoes. He wore aviator sunglasses and had a tattoo on the left side of his neck.</p> <p>The woman is described as white with long brown hair, weighing 170 pounds and wearing a black dress with thick shoulder straps.</p> <p>Both suspects arrived and left in a gray Chevrolet Impala with an unknown license plate, the sheriff's office said. There are no images or video of the incident.</p> <p>Anyone who is approached or contacted by people matching the above descriptions should ask to inspect their official credentials to verify their identities, the sheriff's office said. If in doubt, call MACC Dispatch at 509-762-1160 in order to confirm someone's identity.</p>
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HEADLINE	<b>01/19 Rare Inauguration Day palindrome date</b>
SOURCE	<a href="https://www.usatoday.com/story/news/nation/2021/01/19/inauguration-day-palindrome-dates-2021-january-december/4216942001/">https://www.usatoday.com/story/news/nation/2021/01/19/inauguration-day-palindrome-dates-2021-january-december/4216942001/</a>
GIST	<p>NASHVILLE, Tenn. — Wednesday will inaugurate the <a href="#">first string of palindrome dates this year</a>, beginning with 1-20-21 and ending with 1-29-21.</p> <p>It will also mark the first <a href="#">Inauguration Day</a> in American history that falls on a rare seven-digit palindrome date, according to the <a href="#">Farmers' Almanac</a>. The next one isn't for another 1,000 years on Jan. 20, 3021.</p> <p>Wednesday's seven-digit palindrome is one of 26 such dates in the 21st century.</p> <p>A palindrome is a word, verse, sentence, or number that reads the same backward and forward, according to the <a href="#">Merriam-Webster</a> dictionary.</p>

This year is filled with 22 palindrome dates, which is remarkable because there are only two years in a century where this can happen: the years ending in 11 and 21, according to Dr. Aziz Inan, a professor at the University of Portland who has been studying palindrome dates for over a decade.

"The year 2011 had 22 (palindrome dates), and in the next century, they will be found in 2111 and 2121," Inan said to Farmer's Almanac.

Another stretch of palindrome dates this year will start on Dec. 1, jump-starting nine consecutive days filled with five-digit palindromes.

There was already one palindrome this year, 1-2-21, which was a four-digit date. There are 19 five-digit palindromes this year, plus two six-digit ones, per the Farmers' Almanac.

#### List of palindrome dates in 2021

- 1-2-21
- 1-20-21 (Also a seven-digit palindrome: 1-20-2021)
- 1-21-21
- 1-22-21
- 1-23-21
- 1-24-21
- 1-25-21
- 1-26-21
- 1-27-21
- 1-28-21
- 1-29-21
- 12-1-21
- 12-2-21 (Also an eight-digit palindrome: 12-02-2021)
- 12-3-21
- 12-4-21
- 12-5-21
- 12-6-21
- 12-7-21
- 12-8-21
- 12-9-21
- 12-11-21
- 12-22-21

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HEADLINE	01/19 Study: Seattle 2 <sup>nd</sup> most transient large city
SOURCE	<a href="https://www.seattlepi.com/realestate/article/seattle-ranked-2nd-most-transient-large-city-15882258.php">https://www.seattlepi.com/realestate/article/seattle-ranked-2nd-most-transient-large-city-15882258.php</a>
GIST	<p><a href="#">Seattle</a> ranked as the second most transient large city across the U.S., according to a new study.</p> <p>The study, <a href="#">from Construction Coverage</a>, found 23.4% of the population moved throughout the year, a total of 175,193 movers. This includes the 113,430 people who moved within the same county, 13,772 who moved from a different county in the same state, 36,926 who moved from a different state and 11,065 who moved from abroad.</p> <p>According to the study, the rate at which people move around has been declining since the early 2000s.</p> <p>"According to U.S. Census data, geographic mobility peaked in the late 1980s, then held steady through the 1990s before entering a slow decline at the beginning of this century," the study said.</p>

The report attributed this to a number of factors, including that Baby Boomers reached middle age and became more stable with their careers and families. The recession also had an impact in pushing "mobility further downward."

"Simultaneously, many desirable locations have become more expensive, which makes it more difficult for people to move both between and within geographic areas," the study said.

Still, young adults continue to be transient. The areas across the country that have the greatest numbers of young adults are also typically those areas with the greatest numbers of people moving around, the study said. The [coronavirus pandemic](#) will also likely have a substantial impact on where people are the most transient moving forward.

To find the cities that were the most transient, researchers looked at data from the U.S. Census Bureau and found the "percentage of each location's 2019 population that had moved within the past year."

### **1. Minneapolis**

Percentage of population who moved in the past year: 24.0%

Total movers: 101,783

Moved within the same county: 62,011

Moved from different county (same state): 19,312

Moved from a different state: 16,028

Moved from abroad: 4,432

Population: 423,224

Percentage of population aged 20–29: 21.6%

### **2. Seattle**

Percentage of population who moved in the past year: 23.4%

Total movers: 175,193

Moved within the same county: 113,430

Moved from different county (same state): 13,772

Moved from a different state: 36,926

Moved from abroad: 11,065

Population: 747,296

Percentage of population aged 20–29: 21.3%

### **3. Columbus**

Percentage of population who moved in the past year: 22.7%

Total movers: 201,275

Moved within the same county: 146,260

Moved from different county (same state): 31,649

Moved from a different state: 18,109

Moved from abroad: 5,257

Population: 887,026

Percentage of population aged 20–29: 19.5%

### **4. Austin**

Percentage of population who moved in the past year: 22.1%

Total movers: 213,743

Moved within the same county: 126,443

Moved from different county (same state): 43,408

Moved from a different state: 30,690

Moved from abroad: 13,202

Population: 967,577

Percentage of population aged 20–29: 19.0%

### **5. Tucson**

	<p>Percentage of population who moved in the past year: 21.6%</p> <p>Total movers: 117,121</p> <p>Moved within the same county: 80,084</p> <p>Moved from different county (same state): 11,768</p> <p>Moved from a different state: 19,050</p> <p>Moved from abroad: 6,219</p> <p>Population: 543,386</p> <p>Percentage of population aged 20–29: 20.0%</p>
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HEADLINE	<b>01/19 Report: Wash. 3<sup>rd</sup> worst state to drive in</b>
SOURCE	<a href="https://www.thenewtribune.com/news/state/washington/article248606550.html">https://www.thenewtribune.com/news/state/washington/article248606550.html</a>
GIST	<p>With the cost of vehicles and gas among the highest in the nation, Washington is the third worst state in the nation to drive in, trailing California and Hawaii, according to a new report.</p> <p>Personal finance company WalletHub released the report, titled “<a href="#">2021’s Best and Worst States to Drive in</a>,” Tuesday.</p> <p>The report compared 50 states with four key dimensions: cost of ownership and maintenance, traffic and infrastructure, safety, and access to vehicles and maintenance, according to the release. WalletHub used 31 metrics to evaluate those dimensions, including the average cost of gas, rush-hour traffic, traffic fatality rate, car theft rate, repair shops per capita, etc.</p> <p>Washington ranked 48th in cost of vehicle ownership and maintenance, 48th in gas prices, 35th for traffic and infrastructure, and 13th in safety and 14th in access to vehicles and maintenance.</p> <p>WalletHub previously identified <a href="#">Seattle as one of the worst cities for driving</a> in 2020, McClatchy News previously reported. Seattle ranked 91 out of 100 cities — meaning only nine U.S. cities ranked worse when it comes to overall driving conditions, according to WalletHub.</p> <p>The company used the same factors to evaluate the city’s ranking.</p> <p>California was 49th for driving and Hawaii came in dead last, the 2021 report showed.</p> <p>Texas is the best state to drive in, according to the report.</p>
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HEADLINE	<b>01/19 Officials introduce bill to create 51<sup>st</sup> state</b>
SOURCE	<a href="https://www.thenewtribune.com/news/state/washington/article248600685.html">https://www.thenewtribune.com/news/state/washington/article248600685.html</a>
GIST	<p>Some Washington officials want to <a href="#">create the 51st</a> state by splitting theirs in half.</p> <p>State representatives introduced a bill Monday that would create a new state called Liberty. The newly formed state would exist in the eastern part of what is currently Washington, according to House Bill 1239.</p> <p>“The western boundary of Liberty follows the crest of the Cascade mountains and the western borders of Okanogan, Chelan, Kittitas, Yakima, and Klickitat counties,” the bill states. “The eastern, northern, and southern borders of Liberty are the existing state borders.”</p> <p>In addition to establishing new state lines, the bill proposes creating 15 transition committees that would establish governmental functions within Liberty. Those include education, executive functions, legislative functions, judicial functions and courts, debt, statewide elections, health care and more.</p>

	<p>The bill was introduced by <a href="#">Rep. Rob Chase</a> and <a href="#">Rep. Bob McCaslin</a>, Republicans who represent Washington's fourth state house district.</p> <p>The concept of <a href="#">splitting Washington state</a> into two isn't new, The Olympian reported in 2018. The idea has been around for decades and was pushed heavily by former state Rep. Matt Shea.</p> <p>Voters in rural eastern and southwest Washington tend to be more conservative on state initiatives than the rest of the state. The urban northwest, which includes Seattle and Tacoma, has historically backed more liberal candidates and initiatives.</p> <p>People who support the <a href="#">creation of Liberty</a> say Washington is "already two states on virtually every major issue of the day," according to the movement's website.</p> <p>"The Liberty State Movement is an effort to create a new state from Washington State based upon political and geographic lines," the website says. "Since the formation of Washington State in 1889, people of the eastern and rural parts of Washington State have felt separate from the western capitol in Olympia."</p> <p>The process to <a href="#">create a new state</a>, however, isn't easy — and it's unlikely. The bill would need to pass and be approved at a state level, then get the approval of the U.S. Congress.</p>
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HEADLINE	<b>01/19 Ongoing collapse of world's aquifers</b>
SOURCE	<a href="https://www.wired.com/story/the-ongoing-collapse-of-the-worlds-aquifers/">https://www.wired.com/story/the-ongoing-collapse-of-the-worlds-aquifers/</a>
GIST	<p><b>AS CALIFORNIA'S ECONOMY</b> skyrocketed during the 20th century, its land headed in the opposite direction. A booming agricultural industry in the state's San Joaquin Valley, combined with punishing droughts, led to the over-extraction of water from aquifers. Like huge, empty water bottles, the aquifers crumpled, a phenomenon geologists call subsidence. By 1970, the land had sunk <a href="#">as much as 28 feet</a> in the valley, with less-than-ideal consequences for the humans and infrastructure above the aquifers.</p> <p>The San Joaquin Valley was geologically primed for collapse, but its plight is not unique. All over the world—from the Netherlands to Indonesia to Mexico City—geology is conspiring with climate change to sink the ground under humanity's feet. More punishing droughts mean the increased draining of aquifers, and rising seas make sinking land all the more vulnerable to flooding. According to a recent <a href="#">study</a> published in the journal <i>Science</i>, in the next two decades, 1.6 billion people could be affected by subsidence, with potential losses in the trillions of dollars.</p> <p>"Subsidence has been neglected in a lot of ways because it is slow moving. You don't recognize it until you start seeing damage," says Michelle Sneed, a land subsidence specialist at the U.S. Geological Survey and coauthor on the paper. "The land sinking itself is not a problem. But if you're on the coast, it's a big problem. If you have infrastructure that crosses long areas, it's a big problem. If you have deep wells, they're collapsing because of subsidence. That's a problem."</p> <p>For subsidence to become a problem, you need two things: The right kind of land, and an over-exploited aquifer. Aquifers hold water in between bits of sand, gravel, or clay. When the amount of clay in an aquifer is particularly high, the grains arrange themselves like plates thrown haphazardly in a sink—they've basically got random orientations, and the water fills in the spaces between the grains. But if you start extracting water from an aquifer, those spaces collapse and the grains draw closer together. "Those plates rearrange themselves into more like a stack of dinner plates that you put in your cupboard," says Sneed. "It takes a lot less space, obviously, to stack the plates that way. And so that's the compaction of the aquifer system that then results in land subsidence at the surface."</p> <p>But wouldn't pumping more water back into the aquifer force the clay plates back to their random, spacey orientations? Unfortunately, no. "It'll press those grains apart a little bit—you'll get a little bit of expansion</p>



in the aquifer system represented as uplift on the land surface. But it's a tiny amount," says Sneed. We're talking maybe three quarters of an inch of movement. "They're still stacked like the plates in your cupboard," she continues.

So at this point you've got a double-barreled problem: The land has sunk and it won't reinflate, and the aquifers won't hold as much water as they once did, because they've compressed. "And that's an important point," says Sneed. "As places around the world, including California, are starting to use aquifer systems as managed reservoirs, the compaction of them prior to now has reduced their ability to store water."

As the growing human population and more intense droughts brought on by climate change are putting ever more stress on water supplies, land is subsiding all over the world. Some parts of the Indonesian capital of Jakarta, for instance, are [sinking as much as 10 inches a year](#), all while the seas are rising around it. Models estimate that in just three decades, 95 percent of North Jakarta could be underwater. The situation is so dire, Indonesia is planning [to move its capital](#).

But scientists haven't modeled *global* risks of subsidence—until now. To build their model, Sneed and her colleagues scoured the existing literature on land subsidence in 200 locations worldwide. They considered those geological factors (high clay content), as well as topology, as subsidence is more likely to happen on flat land. They factored in population and economic growth, data on water use, and climate variables.

The researchers found that, planet-wide, subsidence could threaten 4.6 million square miles of land in the next two decades. While that's just 8 percent of Earth's land, humanity tends to build big cities in coastal areas, which are prone to subsidence. So they estimate that, in the end, 1.6 billion people could be affected. The modeling further found that worldwide, subsidence exposes assets totaling a gross domestic product of \$8.19 trillion, or 12 percent of global GDP.

True, gradual subsidence isn't as destructive as a sudden earthquake or volcanic eruption. "But it will cause these indirect effects or impacts that, in the long term, can produce either damages to structures or infrastructure, or increase floodable areas in these river basins or coastal areas," says geoscientist Gerardo Herrera-García of the Geological and Mining Institute of Spain, lead author on the paper.

Subsidence is uniquely sensitive to climate change—at least indirectly. On a warmer planet, droughts are longer and more intense. "This is very important," says Herrera-García. "Because no matter the amount of annual rainfall you have, the most important issue is that you have a *prolonged* drought period." Dry reservoirs will lead cities to pump even more water out of their aquifers, and once you collapse the structure of an aquifer by neatly stacking those plates of clay grains, there's no going back. For the 1.6 billion people potentially affected by subsidence—and that's just by the year 2040—the consequences could be dire, leading to both water shortages and the flooding of low-lying land.

"It's definitely very startling results," says USGS coastal geologist Patrick Barnard, who studies subsidence but wasn't involved in this new work. "Especially coastal megacities—most of the megacities are, in fact, coastal. So it really highlights the issue in relation to coastal flooding." And urban populations are booming: According to [the United Nations](#), nearly 70 percent of humans [will live in cities by 2050](#), up from 50 percent currently.

Humanity has tended to construct its cities where rivers empty into the sea, where the conditions for subsidence are ideal. Long ago, these rivers deposited sediments loaded with the clay, which humans then built upon. "The areas that are at high risk are in those kinds of settings near the outlets of river deltas, and where you have low-lying, flat sedimentary basins near coasts," says University of California, Berkeley geophysicist Roland Burgmann, who studies subsidence but wasn't involved in this new work. But you can actually find this problem inland, too, for instance in Mexico City, which is built on top of the sediments of a former lake, and is accordingly [suffering from subsidence](#).

Cities built on landfill are also sinking as that material settles. In the Bay Area megalopolis, for instance, some areas are sinking as much as [a third of an inch a year](#). Modeling estimates from researchers at

Arizona State University and UC Berkeley hold that by the end of the century, as much as [165 square miles of the Bay Area](#) could be inundated as land sinks and the sea rises.

Subsidence gets even trickier because its effects can vary dramatically over short distances, depending on factors like local clay composition or which side of an earthquake fault the land happens to be on. So this new global study is great for determining risk on a large scale, but scientists will still have to investigate subsidence with a finer focus.

“This kind of model presented here lays the ground for identifying the areas that are at higher risk,” says Arizona State University geophysicist Manoochehr Shirzaei, who [studies subsidence](#) and peer reviewed the new paper. “And then we deploy monitoring tools and methods to come up with very high-resolution measurements.” To get this more localized data, researchers map a landscape using lasers fired from an aircraft, and combine that with information from satellites that shoot radar at the ground to determine how quickly it’s sinking.

Really, the only way humanity will be able to stave off subsidence is to stop over-exploiting aquifers, a tall order on a rapidly warming planet. “Aquifers will be depleted, one way or another,” says Shirzaei. “It’s not possible to ask people who are in need of fresh water to stop using groundwater because it causes subsidence. So the bigger picture is: What are the adaptation strategies?” That could mean elevating buildings on lands that are subsiding and flooding. It could mean relying more on desalinating seawater, though that remains highly energy intensive, and therefore expensive. Or cities might follow in the footsteps of Los Angeles, which is modifying its streets to [collect precious rainwater](#).

At the end of the day, subsiding cities are up against unstoppable physical forces. “Geology is geology,” says Sneed. “We can’t do anything about that.”

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HEADLINE	01/19 King Co. calendar erase religious holidays
SOURCE	<a href="https://mynorthwest.com/2474809/rantz-king-county-erases-christmas-hanukkah-easter-calendar/">https://mynorthwest.com/2474809/rantz-king-county-erases-christmas-hanukkah-easter-calendar/</a>
GIST	<p>The King County Office of Equity and Social Justice (OESJ) spent taxpayer dollars on a calendar that erases the names Christmas, Easter, and Hanukkah. Actually, it erases most holidays, replacing them with heritage celebration months to better reflect the office’s commitment to diversity — so long as it doesn’t represent Christians or Jews.</p> <p>Their reason? They cited themes of equity around traditional holidays. It’s a giant virtue signal.</p> <p>Despite ample time, and a protracted back and forth over email, the county won’t even offer basic details about the decision. They merely admit this isn’t the first time they omitted holidays in a calendar. But behind the scenes, the Jason Rantz Show on KTTH has learned they may make changes moving forward, now that concerns have been raised.</p> <p>Why is this important? One critic, a sitting King County Councilmember, notes this promotes exclusion, not inclusion.</p> <p><b>Erasing holidays over equity concerns</b></p> <p>OESJ releases an annual calendar to King County employees. It includes art work and an inspirational quote that reflect a commitment to social justice.</p> <p>But the calendar also erases most mentions of the federal and county holidays employees get off. The only exceptions are Martin Luther King Jr Day and Juneteenth, since they represent holidays the OESJ can support.</p> <p>The holidays not mentioned by name have circles around their dates.</p>

Thanksgiving is omitted from the calendar, replaced with Native American Heritage Month. Christmas isn't mentioned on the calendar, either. Instead, it celebrates International Human Rights Day on December 10.

Hanukkah most definitely doesn't get a mention, even though Jews are an underrepresented minority in King County. Acknowledging Jews stopped being progressive around the start of the anti-Semitic Boycott-Divest-Sanction movement. But in April, the calendar celebrates Arab American Heritage Month, though no mention of Jewish American Heritage Month in May.

The calendar is similar to one [released in 2019](#).

"Inclusion is not accomplished by exclusion," King County Councilmember Kathy Lambert told the Jason Rantz Show on KTTH.

Lambert, who says the calendar is taxpayer-funded, spoke with members of OESJ. Some cited themes around equity to explain omitting the holidays.

"When I asked about why it was left off, I was told that this is from the perspective of equity and social justice," Lambert explains. "Well I believe equity and social justice should be respectful of all beliefs and include major significant dates for every group, which would include people of faith."

### **King County provides no answers, but a lot of emails**

Neither members of the OESJ nor the spokesperson for the King County Executive's Office provided any meaningful details around the calendar. But I sure did get plenty of emails telling me nothing.

No one from OESJ responded to my request for more information, which simply asked for context around the calendar. A County spokesperson did, however, respond.

A spokesperson told me he could "maybe get more info" on my requests, so I held off on this story. He wasn't able, or perhaps willing, to provide the context I was asking for.

Instead, the spokesperson explained to me what was on the calendar: "The additional acknowledgements underneath each month reflect best practice Heritage Months (or Commemorative observances) that are recognized by a variety of institutions across the country."

I already knew this because I looked at the calendar.

When I again asked for context around why they formatted the calendar in this way, my emails weren't returned.

They could, of course, simply say they wanted to focus on social justice causes. Instead, they ignore requests. That makes it seem like their intent was to be exclusionary on the taxpayer's dime.

### **Inclusion, not exclusion**

Lambert took notice of the calendar because it purposefully excludes most residents, particularly those who celebrate the religious holidays unmentioned by OESJ.

"My main concern is that Christmas and Hanukkah were not labeled nor was there a title that said something along the line of holy time for religions," Lambert told the Jason Rantz Show on KTTH. "This is one more example of how the county avoids anything religious. While I realize our county has a low weekly church / faith meeting hall attendance, there are many people who celebrate Christmas or observe it as a special time of year, as well as Hanukkah. Then there is Easter... This leaves out an important date for many."

Lambert sees this as part of an anti-faith pattern, arguing the country "turns away faith partners" due to county regulations.

	<p>For example, Lambert remembers faith groups offering services to the county to help residents dealing with alcoholism or drug abuse. But county regulations, Lambert says, won't allow support of these groups because they require their employees to share their religious beliefs.</p> <p><b>A promise to change</b></p> <p>Lambert says she spoke with members of OESJ to share her concerns. And after questions from the Jason Rantz Show on KTTH, the office was ready to make some changes.</p> <p>"They said they did not intend to be excluding anyone," Lambert recounts of her discussion.</p> <p>The councilmember says the office has committed to making updates for the next year.</p>
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HEADLINE	<b>01/19 Medical tourism still draws patients</b>
SOURCE	<a href="https://www.nytimes.com/2021/01/19/world/medical-tourism-is-drawing-patients-even-in-a-pandemic.html">https://www.nytimes.com/2021/01/19/world/medical-tourism-is-drawing-patients-even-in-a-pandemic.html</a>
GIST	<p>The coronavirus pandemic has <a href="#">pushed millions of Americans into poverty</a> and <a href="#">stripped more than 5.4 million of them of their health insurance</a>, according to a study by Families USA, a nonpartisan consumer advocacy group.</p> <p>Many people have put off medical procedures, and seen their health deteriorate significantly. The fear of large medical bills has outweighed fear of contagion for some, giving rise to an increased number of patients seeking medical treatment in a foreign country.</p> <p>"We are seeing a pent-up demand for medical tourism during the pandemic, particularly in the U.S. where a fast-growing number of Americans are traveling across the land border with Mexico for health purposes," said David G. Vequist IV, the founder of the <a href="#">Center for Medical Tourism Research</a> and a professor at the <a href="#">University of the Incarnate Word</a> in San Antonio.</p> <p>Even before the pandemic, millions of Americans traveled to other countries for savings of 40 to 80 percent on medical treatments, according to the global medical tourism guide <a href="#">Patients Beyond Borders</a>. Mexico and Costa Rica have become the most popular destinations for dental care, cosmetic surgery and prescription medicines, while Thailand, India and South Korea draw patients for more complex procedures involving orthopedics, cardiovascular issues, cancer and fertility treatment.</p> <p>In 2019, 1.1 percent of Americans traveling internationally did so for health treatments, according to the <a href="#">National Travel and Tourism Office</a>, although that figure accounts only for those who went by air.</p> <p>Medical tourism has been decimated by coronavirus restrictions, but, even so, the twin crises of the economy and the enormous strain that Covid-19 has placed on the already faulty <a href="#">American health care system</a> are pushing many patients to travel. Demand for nonessential surgeries has also been building up after more than 177,000 scheduled surgeries were postponed in the United States between March and June last year, according to the Center for Medical Tourism Research.</p>
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HEADLINE	<b>01/19 Teen snow cave; Canadian survival lore</b>
SOURCE	<a href="https://www.nytimes.com/2021/01/19/world/canada/snow-cave-survival-british-columbia.html?surface=most-popular&amp;fallback=false&amp;req_id=575143146&amp;algo=bandit-all-surfaces&amp;variant=1_bandit-all-surfaces_daysback_4&amp;imp_id=403477868&amp;action=click&amp;module=Most%20Popular&amp;pgtype=Homepage">https://www.nytimes.com/2021/01/19/world/canada/snow-cave-survival-british-columbia.html?surface=most-popular&amp;fallback=false&amp;req_id=575143146&amp;algo=bandit-all-surfaces&amp;variant=1_bandit-all-surfaces_daysback_4&amp;imp_id=403477868&amp;action=click&amp;module=Most%20Popular&amp;pgtype=Homepage</a>

In Canada, a country of rugged snow-covered mountains and frigidly cold weather, there have long been extraordinary tales of winter survival.

There was [the story of John Gow](#), who in 1969 survived a plane crash and five days in the mountains of British Columbia.

There [was the 2-year-old in Rouleau](#), Saskatchewan, who in late February 1994 was found frozen on her doorstep after five hours in minus 8 degree Fahrenheit weather, but miraculously lived.

And now there is Robert Waldner, a 17-year-old chess-loving teenager who built an elaborate snow cave shelter in British Columbia last weekend after getting stranded on a mountain during a family outing. It is a feat of survival without the drama of a plane crash or frozen toddler but with a happy ending that has nevertheless captured Canadian imaginations during these pandemic times.

This latest tale of Canadian resilience took place this past Saturday when Robert, a 6-foot-4 high school athlete with a passion for biology, was separated from his father and brother while snowmobiling on a trail in Mica Mountain in central British Columbia.

With an elevation of roughly 7,200 feet, the mountain is known for its caribou population, its grizzly bears — now thankfully hibernating — and temperatures that can fall as low as minus 58 degrees Fahrenheit, according to [Val Severin](#), a funeral director, who also works as a volunteer rescue manager at [South Cariboo Search and Rescue](#), the group that rescued the teenager.

Robert was on a trail with his family, when his brother's snowmobile suddenly stalled and his father went to help him.

The teenager sped ahead, he recalled, and by the time he realized he was alone he was in a remote and unfamiliar area. Robert said he tried to backtrack but the slope was steep, and so he rode his snowmobile down the trail to a meadow, where he gravitated toward a line of trees in search of shelter.

It was there, he said, that he came up with the idea of building a snow cave, which he constructed using a snow shovel to dig a hole in the ground about seven-feet deep, more than three-feet wide and about seven feet in length. He used his hands to build a door with a hole underneath for ventilation and also shelves for his belongings. He said the moisture from his breath helped create a protective sheet of ice within the cave, keeping him warm. As the hours passed, he said he hunkered down, and steeled himself for a night inside the cave.

Robert said he also left the snowmobile in a visible area in the meadow where rescuers or a helicopter could see it.

The idea for the cave, he said, came from “improvising in the heat of the moment,” and he had also honed his cave-making skills while playing in the snow by his home, which is near 100 Mile House, a sleepy former mill town in British Columbia that was once a fur-trading station.

His instinct to build a shelter was all the more urgent since he had only half a ham sandwich and he worried his phone, which didn't have a signal, would run out of power.

“It took me about two hours to build it,” he said. “I was shivering, so I couldn't sleep. But I was confident that my structure would allow me to survive. I also thought I would be rescued and was more bored than scared.”

His mother, Denise Waldner, an accountant originally from Zurich, Switzerland, said that she had been overcome by anxiety, fearful that he had been in a snowmobile wreck or had crashed into a tree. “Next time he will have a tarp, a fire-starter and a lot more food,” she said in an interview.

	<p>At 4 p.m., after the teenager's family realized he was missing, they spent two hours searching for him, before calling the search-and-rescue team, who sped to the snowmobiling trail.</p> <p>Robert said he was relieved when the rescuers found him at 10:43 p.m. "I was quite joyful," he said, adding that being a hockey player had helped him to stay focused and calm.</p> <p>On social media, Canadians have praised the teenager's studious pragmatism, with some suggesting he join the scouts or a search-and-rescue team. Robert said he hoped to be an emergency room nurse or a paramedic.</p> <p>Ms. Severin said the cave was not only visually impressive but had been a canny shelter from the cold and the elements. She was not surprised it was already becoming part of Canadian survival lore.</p> <p>"With all this pandemic bad news, we all need a happy ending right now," she said.</p>
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## Crime, Criminals

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HEADLINE	<b>01/19 Tacoma: 3 homicides in 3 weeks</b>
SOURCE	<a href="https://www.q13fox.com/news/tacoma-had-a-47-increase-in-homicides-in-2020-this-year-theyve-had-three-in-three-weeks">https://www.q13fox.com/news/tacoma-had-a-47-increase-in-homicides-in-2020-this-year-theyve-had-three-in-three-weeks</a>
GIST	<p><b>TACOMA, WA</b> - In 2020, Tacoma saw a 47% increase in homicides in comparison to the year before; so far in 2021 there have been three homicides in less than three full weeks.</p> <p><a href="#">On Monday night</a>, Tacoma Police responded to two separate shooting incidents.</p> <p>In total, four people were shot, and one was killed. In both incidents, no arrests have been made and there is no suspect information.</p> <p>"It's disheartening, and it brings me to tears," said Candace Wesley.</p> <p>Wesley is the founder of Tacoma Cease Fire, an organization created in 2019 when the city dealt with an increase in homicides.</p> <p>In 2018, there were 18 homicides; in 2019, the number of homicides increased to 21.</p> <p>Tacoma placed an emphasis on curbing the violence that year. Wesley, and several city officials and community members marched through the streets.</p> <p>However, in 2020, the same amount of attention was not placed on the issue. Wesley believes a big part of the reason was the pandemic.</p> <p>"Once 2020 came in, we were prepared to go full throttle, but then we were hit with the pandemic," she said. "When the pandemic came, it came in like a flood and no one knew what to do," Wesley added.</p> <p>Wesley says the pandemic made outreach difficult due to social distancing.</p> <p>As well, the pandemic and police accountability became large topics that demanded focus.</p> <p>She says even if the focus was placed on other areas in 2020, the safety of the Tacoma community and lowering the number of homicides is a top priority.</p> <p>"We're fighting to live through a pandemic. We shouldn't be fighting to save ourselves from each other," she said.</p>



	<p>Tacoma City Mayor Victoria Woodards says the violence in the city is not something she can accept.</p> <p>"I'm extremely concerned about the increase of homicides we've had both in 2020, and 2021. Homicides are up across the country during COVID. I recognize the effects of COVID run deep. I'll continue to work with our new police chief, our city manager, and the rest of my council to find ways to address the uptick in homicides"</p> <p>All crime data and numbers are provided by Tacoma Police.</p> <p>Tacoma Police ask anyone with information regarding the two shootings during Monday night and early Tuesday morning to call 911.</p>
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HEADLINE	<b>01/19 Arrest: breaching Governor's mansion</b>
SOURCE	<a href="https://www.khq.com/wsp-arrest-man-for-suspected-involvement-in-breaching-gov-s-mansion-on-jan-6/article_019b6a42-5ab5-11eb-99bf-1b8680904f67.html">https://www.khq.com/wsp-arrest-man-for-suspected-involvement-in-breaching-gov-s-mansion-on-jan-6/article_019b6a42-5ab5-11eb-99bf-1b8680904f67.html</a>
GIST	<p>The Washington State Patrol and Seattle Police arrested a man for his alleged involvement in breaching the Governor's mansion on January 6.</p> <p>According to WSP, 26-year-old Damon Huseman was arrested for second-degree assault, felony harassment and criminal trespassing.</p> <p>Huseman was taken into custody without incident and was booked into the Thurston County Jail.</p>
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HEADLINE	<b>01/19 Charge: 'expert' was paid Iran mouthpiece</b>
SOURCE	<a href="https://www.washingtonpost.com/national-security/kaveh-lotfolah-afrasiabi-iran/2021/01/19/ebb2512c-5a97-11eb-8bcf-3877871c819d_story.html">https://www.washingtonpost.com/national-security/kaveh-lotfolah-afrasiabi-iran/2021/01/19/ebb2512c-5a97-11eb-8bcf-3877871c819d_story.html</a>
GIST	<p>NEW YORK — An author who has presented himself as a foreign relations expert and political scientist was really a paid mouthpiece for the Iranian government and has been charged with violating the law requiring foreign agents to register with the U.S. government, federal prosecutors said Tuesday.</p> <p>Kaveh Lotfolah Afrasiabi, an Iranian-born veteran academic who has been a lawful resident of the United States for more than 35 years and who received his education in this country, was taken into custody by FBI agents in Massachusetts on charges that he violated the Foreign Agents Registration Act (FARA), which requires individuals working as agents in the United States on behalf of foreign countries to register.</p> <p>Since 2007, 63-year-old Afrasiabi has “derived a significant portion of his income from compensation for services performed at the direction and under the control” of the Iranian government, answering to officials at the Permanent Mission of the Islamic Republic of Iran to the United Nations, in Manhattan, according to an arrest warrant affidavit and criminal complaint filed Tuesday in federal court in Brooklyn.</p> <p>The complaint against Afrasiabi notes that FARA is in place “to prevent covert influence . . . by foreign principals” in the United States. Agents of other governments are required to disclose their activities and payments that are issued to them for their work on behalf of other nations.</p> <p>The U.S. Attorney’s Office for the Eastern District of New York is handling the case. Afrasiabi is expected to be transferred to New York to face charges. Many payments from the mission to Afrasiabi</p>

were processed by a financial institution in Queens. From July 2007 to November 2020, he allegedly received at least \$265,000 and was provided with other benefits as an employee of the mission.

Officials allege that, taking directions from press secretaries at the mission, Afrasiabi frequently did interviews with news outlets including Al Jazeera. In 2009, he was the subject of an online Q&A hosted by The Washington Post. The Post has also published letters to the editor submitted by Afrasiabi.

While working as a secret spokesperson for the Iranian government, he was paid and received health-care benefits from Iran, according to investigators. His assignments included opining on Iran's nuclear policy in discussions with U.S. officials, while presenting himself as an independent expert, officials said.

Afrasiabi's role as an employee of Iran was not disclosed in 2009 when he assisted a U.S. congressman, who was not identified in court papers, in drafting a letter to President Barack Obama promoting a fuel swap agreement that Iran had proposed. He was identified in that letter only as "a former professor at Tehran University and a former adviser to the Iranian nuclear negotiation team," the complaint continues.

Some of Afrasiabi's efforts involved trying to pry sensitive information from Americans, officials said in court documents.

He allegedly emailed a State Department official asking for "the administration's latest thinking" on the "Iran nuclear issue," also without revealing the nature of his relationship to Iran, according to the documents.

Afrasiabi also allegedly continued communications with the elected official's office for years, in an attempt to advance the agenda of Iran's government. In one letter with a contact at the mission, he complained that his progress was stalled because the U.S. government "is in the palms of zionists."

From affiliates at the Iranian mission, he allegedly sought approval and guidance on articles, books and interviews that he did under the guise of being an academic in the field, not an employee of Iran. When a deputy ambassador told him to make edits to an article he submitted to a publication to steer away from subjects that were seen as harmful to Iran, Afrasiabi complied.

According to a 1996 article in the [Harvard Crimson](#), Afrasiabi sued Harvard University, claiming that he was defamed by comments made by professors around the time he was accused of extortion, a case that was dismissed. A 2010 piece on [WickedLocal.com](#) says he was arrested for an old vehicle registration issue after a dispute with a restaurant in Cambridge.

Afrasiabi appeared Tuesday in a federal court in Boston because he was arrested in Massachusetts, where he lives. On the Zoom court proceeding, he wore a tan, jail-issued shirt and a white face mask. He was ordered detained until his detention hearing, which is set for Friday.

A lawyer representing Afrabiasi at the virtual court appearance could not be reached for comment.

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HEADLINE	01/19 Jailed 43yrs; criticizing Thai monarchy
SOURCE	<a href="https://www.nytimes.com/2021/01/19/world/asia/thailand-king-lese-majeste.html">https://www.nytimes.com/2021/01/19/world/asia/thailand-king-lese-majeste.html</a>
GIST	<p>BANGKOK — The onetime civil servant's crime was to share audio clips on social media that were deemed critical of Thailand's monarchy. The sentence, handed down on Tuesday by a criminal court in Bangkok, was more than 43 years in prison.</p> <p>It was the longest sentence yet for violating <a href="#">Thailand's notoriously tough lèse-majesté law</a>, which makes it a crime to defame senior members of the royal family, according to the group Thai Lawyers for Human</p>

Rights. The former civil servant, Anchan Preeleert, was sentenced to 87 years, but her prison term was cut in half because she agreed to plead guilty.

“Today’s court verdict is shocking and sends a spine-chilling signal that not only criticisms of the monarchy won’t be tolerated but that they will also be severely punished,” said Sunai Phasuk, a senior researcher on Thailand for Human Rights Watch.

Thailand has seen a spike in lèse-majesté cases since late last year, after more than two years during which Section 112 of the criminal code, which applies to criticism of top royals, was not enforced, according to Thai legal groups. The three-year pause came at the behest of King Maha Vajiralongkorn Bodindradebayavarangkun, who wanted such prosecutions halted, according to Prime Minister Prayuth Chan-ocha.

But that was before [a protest movement surged last year](#), targeting both the king and the prime minister. Protesters, who gathered by the thousands in street rallies, have called for the royal family, one of the world’s wealthiest, to come under the purview of Thailand’s Constitution.

They have demanded scrutiny of the palace’s finances, as the king’s lavish lifestyle has contrasted sharply with the economic pain caused by the pandemic. And they have campaigned for the removal of Mr. Prayuth, a former army general who took power in a 2014 coup, promising to protect the royal family from ill-defined threats.

By last fall, [protesters were scribbling graffiti on Bangkok streets](#) denouncing King Maha Vajiralongkorn and his wives and paramours. It was a stunning development in a country where criticism of the monarch had usually been confined to whispers and innuendo, padded with plenty of deniability.

In recent weeks, dozens of Thais, including teenagers and students, have been accused of violating Section 112. With mass student-led protests waning amid an outbreak of the coronavirus in Thailand, human rights groups say the government is using the courts to silence some of the demonstrators.

“It can be seen that Thai authorities are using lèse-majesté prosecution as their last resort measure in response to the youth-led democracy uprising that seeks to curb the king’s powers and keep him within the bound of constitutional rule,” Mr. Sunai said. “Thai authorities are trying to use a sledgehammer to slam this genie back in the bottle.”

Even before the lèse-majesté law was revived in November, other legal mechanisms, including a computer crimes act and a sedition law, were deployed against people deemed to have defamed or insulted top royals. An obscure section of Thailand’s criminal code, making “an act of violence against the queen’s liberty” punishable by life in prison, was enforced for what appeared to be the first time, [against protesters who shouted at a royal motorcade](#).

Section 112 of the criminal code makes insulting or defaming the king or his close relatives an offense punishable by three to 15 years in prison. Each charge is counted separately, which partly explains why Ms. Anchan’s prison sentence is so long.

The case against Ms. Anchan began before the authorities suspended their use of Section 112.

In 2015, the military junta led by then-General Prayuth detained more than a dozen people, including Ms. Anchan, who were accused of being part of an anti-monarchy network. They were charged with using social media to disseminate audio and video recordings seen as critical of then-King Bhumibol Adulyadej, the current king’s father, who was the longest-reigning monarch in the world when he died in 2016.

Bhumibol, who is known as Rama IX, often commuted lengthy lèse-majesté prison sentences. But it is not clear whether his son, who has tightened his grip over the palace’s finances and expanded his military authority, will continue that tradition.

	<p>Although some of the people charged along with Ms. Anchan were swiftly sentenced to years in jail by a military court, her case lingered. Ms. Anchan, who had worked at the Thai Revenue Department for about 30 years, was imprisoned from 2015 to 2018 while awaiting trial, according to her legal team.</p> <p>Pawinee Chumsri, one of Ms. Anchan's lawyers, said they were planning an appeal. But Ms. Pawinee held out little hope for a decline in such cases anytime soon.</p> <p>"The government has announced that they are going to impose the lèse-majesté law," she said. "So I think we will see more and more 112 cases and verdicts because that's the trend of where the government is going."</p>
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HEADLINE	<b>01/19 New evidence points to riot conspiracy</b>
SOURCE	<a href="https://www.nytimes.com/2021/01/19/us/politics/oath-keepers-capitol-riot.html?action=click&amp;module=Top%20Stories&amp;pgtype=Homepage">https://www.nytimes.com/2021/01/19/us/politics/oath-keepers-capitol-riot.html?action=click&amp;module=Top%20Stories&amp;pgtype=Homepage</a>
GIST	<p>WASHINGTON — In the days leading up to the Jan. 6 riot, Thomas Edward Caldwell, an apparent leader of the far-right Oath Keepers, had a message for the militia members he had organized to mobilize against Congress: "This kettle is set to boil."</p> <p>Court documents unsealed on Tuesday said Mr. Caldwell, a 66-year-old from rural Virginia, advised the others on Dec. 31, "It begins for real Jan 5 and 6 on Washington D.C. when we mobilize in the streets. Let them try to certify some crud on capitol hill with a million or more patriots in the streets."</p> <p>Mr. Caldwell and two associates from Ohio — Donovan Crowl, 50, and Jessica Watkins, 38 — were charged with conspiracy to commit federal crimes. All three had admitted to invading the Capitol to reporters and were also identifiable in videos posted on social media.</p> <p>The case revealed the first evidence of planning among a known militia group ahead of the day of <a href="#">chaotic mob violence</a>. Investigators have said they are increasingly focused on right-wing extremist groups to determine whether any plotted aspects of the attack on the Capitol in advance, even as most of the rioters spontaneously stormed it.</p> <p>Mr. Caldwell had advised militia members to stay in a particular Comfort Inn in Washington's suburbs, according to messages cited in court documents, advising that it offered a good base to "hunt at night" — apparently meaning looking for antifa-style left-wing protesters to fight. Ms. Watkins apparently rented a room there under an assumed name, an F.B.I. agent said.</p> <p>Mr. Caldwell appeared virtually in federal court in Virginia on Tuesday, pledging to fight the charges against him. In arguing for release on bond, Mr. Caldwell pointed to his age as well as underlying medical issues and the threat of the coronavirus, noting that he relied on a machine at night to help with sleep apnea. A judge declined the request.</p> <p>Federal investigators also recovered audio recordings of Ms. Watkins' voice during the riot from the Zello cellphone app, which acts like a walkie-talkie, speaking to other people thought to be Oath Keepers. "We have a good group," she said early in the riot, according to the charging document. "We have about 30-40 of us. We are sticking together and sticking to the plan." An unknown male responded, "We'll see you soon, Jess. Airborne."</p> <p>An unidentified man said later, "You are executing citizen's arrest. Arrest this assembly; we have probable cause for acts of treason, election fraud." Ms. Watkins responded that she and others were under the main dome of the Capitol, and another unknown male voice encouraged her to continue, saying this was what they "trained for."</p>

The group they are accused of being part of, the Oath Keepers, is a far-right militia-style organization [founded by military and law enforcement veterans](#) that professes to believe that a shadowy globalist cabal is plotting to take away Americans' rights.

Charging documents against the trio noted that amid the generally chaotic scene as the mob started to push its way into the Capitol, a group dressed in paramilitary gear and Oath Keepers paraphernalia stood out for its coordination. In one video, about 10 Oath Keepers in helmets "move in an organized and practiced fashion and force their way to the front of the crowd gathered around a door to the U.S. Capitol."

Scenes of people with military training marching shoulder to shoulder have horrified Pentagon leaders, who fear that weapons and tactics training once provided by the armed forces were co-opted. [At least 12 National Guard members have been removed from duties related to the inauguration](#), two of them for possible links to right-wing extremist movements, Defense Department officials said on Tuesday.

Others arrested in the riots have been linked to the Oath Keepers, though they have not been accused of being part of an organized conspiracy.

At a hearing in Texas last week for Larry Brock, who was photographed on the Senate floor carrying flexible handcuffs, a prosecutor cited a Facebook post linking him to the Oath Keepers. Mr. Brock, a retired Air Force officer, [told The New Yorker](#) that he had found the flex cuffs on the ground and did not intend to use them.

And a criminal complaint filed Saturday against Jon Ryan Schaffer, a guitarist for the heavy metal band Iced Earth, accused of being among rioters who sprayed Capitol Police with "bear spray," said he has long held "far-right extremist views" and suggested that he is a member of the Oath Keepers.

The Oath Keepers — named for members' professed intent to uphold their oaths to protect the Constitution — have no geographical center, with chapters scattered in Oregon, Montana, Florida, Texas, Arizona, Ohio, New York and elsewhere. Some of its ideology overlaps with the so-called [Three Percenters](#), another paramilitary-style right-wing movement that seeks to attract veterans.

The Oath Keepers have a more formal structure, including bylaws and dues. Although the organization has claimed to have around 35,000 members, the Anti-Defamation League, which tracks extremist groups, [estimated several years ago that](#) its membership is more like several thousand.

The organization was founded in 2009 by Stewart Rhodes, 55, a disbarred Montana lawyer who attended Yale Law School and once worked as an aide to the former Representative Ron Paul, the Texas libertarian. Its members tend to anticipate a coming new civil war.

"It was motivated by the perception that the federal government was tyrannical and that everyday Americans needed to be ready to resist that tyrannical government when it came to the door," said Sam Jackson, who published [a book on the organization last year](#) and is a professor at the University of Albany specializing in homeland security issues.

The Oath Keepers were involved in confrontations with the federal government over land issues in the West, including [the showdown between the Bundy family and the federal government in Oregon in 2014](#). And during the unrest that year after the police killing of a Black man in Ferguson, Mo., heavily armed Oath Keepers patrolled the streets and claimed to protect businesses, but discontinued after criticism from local law enforcement.

The group has also been among those who sent armed vigilantes to patrol the border with Mexico or promoted such efforts by others.

In the weeks leading up to the Capitol assault, Oath Keepers issued heated calls to action. Shortly after the election, a [lengthy message](#) attributed to Mr. Rhodes circulated on far-right websites urging volunteers to

converge on Washington for a “Stop the Steal” rally. Oath Keepers, it said, would provide security, including “some of our most skilled special warfare veterans standing by armed, just outside D.C.”

While participants were instructed to remain disciplined, the message also included what it described as advice from an unidentified “patriot from Serbia,” who said in a speech transcript that Americans must replicate the uprising in his country 20 years ago that deposed Slobodan Milosevic: “Millions gathered in our capital. There were no barricades strong enough to stop them, nor the police determined enough to stop them. Police and Military aligned with the people after few hours of fist-fight. We stormed the Parliament. And burned down fake state Television! WE WON!”

By the time plans were announced for a big rally on Jan. 6, the Oath Keepers’ entreaties had taken on a tone of urgency. An appeal for volunteers framed the event as a last chance to help “President Trump’s fight to defeat the enemies foreign and domestic who are attempting a coup.”

Followers were urged to “prepare yourselves for whatever may come. Prepare your mind, body, and spirit for battle, and above all else, prepare to STAND!”

Mr. Rhodes was in Washington on Jan. 6 — a distinctive figure with his eye patch because he lost an eye to a gun accident. He is not believed to have entered the Capitol himself.

Charging documents said Mr. Caldwell was “believed to have a leadership role” in the group. While Mr. Crowl addressed him as “Commander” in a message cited in court documents, his precise role remains murky.

Mr. Caldwell, however, appeared to think that Mr. Rhodes was doing too little to organize for the day. “I don’t know if Stewie has even gotten out his call to arms but its a little friggin late,” he wrote to Mr. Crowl, according to court papers. “This is one we are doing on our own. We will link up with the north carolina crew.”

Other charging documents identified Ms. Watkins, a bartender from Champaign County, Ohio, who was arrested on Monday, of being affiliated with the Oath Keepers. She said at the top of her account page on Parler, a social media network that attracted a right-wing following, that she is commanding officer “of the Ohio State Regular Militia,” which the complaint identified as “a local militia organization which is a dues-paying subset of the Oath Keepers.”

The F.B.I. identified Mr. Crowl, also from Champaign County, as a member of the same Ohio militia.

The F.B.I. affidavit against all three described several sightings of them in video of the Capitol riot and their own social media postings boasting of storming the building.

For example, the charging document said, Mr. Caldwell sent a picture of the riot that evening to someone on Facebook Messenger, adding, “Us storming the castle” and “I am such an instigator!” He also wrote, “We need to do this at the local level. Lets storm the capitol in Ohio. Tell me when!”

A search of Ms. Watkins’ house after the riot — she was not there, and investigators cited evidence that she and Mr. Crowl had gone to stay with Mr. Caldwell — revealed paramilitary equipment like that used in the riot and instructions to build a bomb using bleach as a primary ingredient, the charging document said.

Other well-known defendants in the Capitol attack were released on Tuesday pending trial at a five-hour string of hearings in Washington. Most were accused of misdemeanors and federal prosecutors did not seek to keep them detained.

Among those released were Adam Johnson, 36, of Florida, who was charged with stealing Speaker Nancy Pelosi’s lectern, and Josiah Colt, 34, of Idaho, who was filmed in a viral image dangling from a balcony of the Senate chamber.



	Two Virginia police officers accused of breaking into the Capitol, Jacob Fracker and Thomas Robertson, were released pending trial.
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HEADLINE	<b>01/19 Mexico: oxygen thefts mount; shortages</b>
SOURCE	<a href="https://abcnews.go.com/International/wireStory/vaccine-doses-stolen-mexico-oxygen-tanks-spark-appeal-75355046">https://abcnews.go.com/International/wireStory/vaccine-doses-stolen-mexico-oxygen-tanks-spark-appeal-75355046</a>
GIST	<p>MEXICO CITY -- Thefts of oxygen mounted as Mexico reported its highest daily death toll since the coronavirus pandemic began, with 1,584 deaths confirmed Tuesday. There was also a near-record one-day rise in new virus cases of 18,894.</p> <p>The Mexican Social Security Institute reported that an armed man burst into a government hospital in northern Sonora state around noon Tuesday and stole seven oxygen tanks.</p> <p>The institute said the man pointed a gun at a hospital employee, demanded to know where the oxygen was kept, and took four empty cannisters and three full ones. Authorities in the city of Navajoa are looking for the man and another suspect who drove off in a car carrying the tanks.</p> <p>Also on Tuesday, police in the town of Tultepec, just north of Mexico City, chased down a small freight truck carrying 44 oxygen tanks, after the truck was reported stolen. Two suspects were detained at the scene.</p> <p>The thefts came as authorities launched a campaign urging people to return rented oxygen tanks they no longer need, saying enormous demand amid the pandemic has created a shortage of the cylinders.</p> <p>The consumer affairs agency launched an online campaign under the slogan “Return Your Tank, For The Love of Life.”</p> <p>With hospitals in Mexico City and other states overwhelmed by a wave of COVID-19 cases, many families have turned to treating their relatives at home with supplementary oxygen, creating spot shortages of tanks and oxygen for refills.</p> <p>But once patients recover, the agency said, many people simply keep the cannisters just in case someone else falls ill.</p> <p>“By doing this they are depriving other patients of something they need at a given moment, and cannot get,” the agency said.</p> <p>Even those who have their own tanks must often wait in long lines and wait hours to get oxygen tanks filled.</p> <p>Mexico has seen almost 1.67 million confirmed coronavirus infections and almost 143,000 test-confirmed deaths related to COVID-19. With the country’s extremely low testing rate, official estimates suggest the real death toll is closer to 195,000.</p> <p>The country’s Defense Department, meanwhile, said four doses of coronavirus vaccine were stolen at a public hospital in Cuernavaca, south of Mexico City, probably by a hospital employee or with the aid of an employee.</p> <p>“This theft was able to be carried out through the dishonesty and greed of a member of the hospital’s vaccination staff,” the department said in a statement.</p>

	<p>The army has been given responsibility for transporting and guarding vaccines in Mexico, but a private security firm was apparently in charge inside the hospital.</p> <p>Before Tuesday, Mexico had received only about 750,000 doses of the Pfizer vaccine, and several people have been sanctioned for cutting lines to get doses. Mexico's total amount so far is enough to vaccinate about half of the country's 750,000 front-line medical personnel, all of whom will need two doses.</p>
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HEADLINE	<b>01/19 Recurring theme Capitol siege: QAnon</b>
SOURCE	<a href="https://abcnews.go.com/US/qanon-emerges-recurring-theme-criminal-cases-tied-us/story?id=75347445">https://abcnews.go.com/US/qanon-emerges-recurring-theme-criminal-cases-tied-us/story?id=75347445</a>
GIST	<p>An abiding sense of loyalty to the fringe online conspiracy movement known as QAnon is emerging as a common thread among scores of the men and women from around the country arrested for their participation in the deadly U.S. Capitol insurrection, court records reveal.</p> <p>The FBI first labeled QAnon and its fluid online community of supporters as a "dangerous extremist group" in August 2019, and over the past two weeks it has featured prominently in criminal indictments filed against many of those alleged to have participated in the Jan. 6 Capitol riot, including a number accused of egregious crimes.</p> <p>Among them is Douglas Jensen, the bearded man seen in a viral video wearing a distinctive "Q" T-shirt, menacing a lone black U.S. Capitol Police officer as he led rioters through the halls and pushed the mob deeper into the Capitol building. Jensen later told investigators that he "intentionally positioned himself" toward the front of the mob so his T-shirt would be visible to cameras and "Q" could "get the credit," according to an FBI affidavit.</p> <p>Cleveland Meredith Jr., who the government also believed to be a supporter of QAnon theories, allegedly posted online about his desire to execute House Speaker Nancy Pelosi by "putting a bullet in her noggin on Live TV," according to court records. He went to Washington, D.C., armed with multiple firearms and more than 2,500 rounds of ammunition in his possession, according to prosecutors. He was late to the rally because his car broke down.</p> <p>At least three more individuals charged on Tuesday are believed to be supporters of the QAnon theory, according to new FBI records.</p> <p>The high profile of QAnon adherents in the Capitol riots represents what experts describe as a stunning evolution from a harmless fringe forum for people peddling outlandish conspiracies to a gathering space for those intent on plotting domestic terror -- and the transformation could present a vexing new challenge for law enforcement.</p> <p>"We don't have a good predictor of where it's going to go," said Mary McCord, a former federal prosecutor and expert in homegrown terror groups who called it "extremely troublesome" to see some elected officials fanning the flames of twisted QAnon theories.</p> <p>"You actually have elected members of Congress who, at best, are not condemning Q, and at worst are actually espousing some of the crazy conspiracy theories -- dangerous conspiracy theories," McCord said.</p> <p>Two newly elected members of the House of Representatives pushed QAnon messages ahead of the 2020 <a href="#">elections</a>. And notably, President <a href="#">Donald Trump</a> brushed aside questions about QAnon when pressed about it before the election in October, saying he knew "nothing" about it.</p> <p>"I do know they are very much against pedophilia, they fight it very hard," Trump said while refusing to condemn the false theories at an Oct. 15 <a href="#">town hall</a> event.</p>

Just weeks earlier, at a White House press briefing in August, the president said QAnon followers "love the country" and added that he appreciated their support -- which in turn helped embolden belief in the movement.

"He said a whole lot by not saying a whole lot at all. For a lot of us supporters, we knew that he really couldn't come out and say, 'Oh yes, I support it,'" Gina Sink, 55, a QAnon supporter from Lexington, N.C., told ABC News at a Trump rally in September following the president's comments.

"Following the November 3, 2020 election, many QAnon adherents began pushing false and discredited theories of massive voter fraud and that the 2020 election had been 'stolen' from President Trump," the Department of Justice warned in a new affidavit on Tuesday.

On Jan. 6, the influence of QAnon on rioters was evident in the mountain of social media videos and photos depicting their raid on the Capitol complex. Several rioters were seen wearing "Q" clothing, and chanting slogans tied to the movement. In a Jan. 13 bulletin prepared by the FBI for law enforcement partners, federal agents reported that "symbols associated with QAnon conspiracy theories" were widely displayed by rioters.

In charging documents, federal prosecutors have noted the apparent influence of QAnon among several participants accused of threatening violence during the siege.

Jacob Chansley, the [horned helmet-wearing rioter](#) who was one of the most widely recognized from the incident, is also believed to be a supporter of QAnon theories.

"Chansley is an active participant in -- and has made himself the most prominent symbol of -- a violent insurrection that attempted to overthrow the United States Government on January 6, 2021," government prosecutors said, using some of its bluntest words yet to describe the riot.

The Jan. 6 attack proved deadly to at least two QAnon adherents. Rosanne Boyland, 34, who was reportedly crushed by the crowd at the Capitol complex, had recently started following QAnon conspiracy theories online, her sister later told the Associated Press. And Ashli Babbitt, who was shot and killed by a U.S. Capitol Police officer inside the Capitol, was later characterized in an FBI bulletin as "an alleged QAnon-supporter."

QAnon, which first surfaced in 2017, rests on the [baseless theory](#) that Trump is fighting against a global network of billionaire pedophiles, devil-worshipping Democrats and baby-eating Hollywood stars and their "deep state" counterparts embedded in the U.S. federal government's sprawling bureaucracy. A growing group of followers consumed and contributed to the false narratives first on the freewheeling social media site known as 4chan, then on other social media sites, fueled by what they thought were cues from "Q," a secret intelligence official they believed was leaving clues about government corruption. It is not clear if "Q" even exists.

Many of the claims are dark and outlandish, and for years adherents to the theory were considered mostly fringe and not a significant threat. They had "keyboard bravado," as one FBI special agent said last week, and were confined to the darkest corners of the web.

But recently, numerous violent incidents have been linked to people who support QAnon theories, and recent polling suggests that the conspiracy theories are reaching wider audiences than previously thought. For example, more than one in three Americans believe a so-called "deep state" is working to undermine Trump -- another unfounded conspiracy commonly peddled by QAnon users -- according to an NPR/Ipsos poll conducted in December.

For law enforcement officials seeking to prevent future violent attacks, the rise of QAnon is presenting fresh challenges. Authorities tasked with monitoring online extremism must now grapple with how to evaluate and combat emerging plots without infringing on constitutionally protected free speech.

	<p>"We have to separate the aspirational from the intentional and determine which of the individuals saying despicable things on the internet are just practicing keyboard bravado, or they actually have the intent to do harm," said FBI agent-in-charge Steven D'Antuono during a press briefing last week.</p> <p>In the wake of the Capitol attack, the FBI prepared a document meant to assist law enforcement partners in identifying QAnon "indicators" online, defining phrases and hashtags used by its followers. But the document also notes that "the FBI does not initiate any investigative activity based solely on the exercise of First Amendment activities."</p> <p>In a separate bulletin distributed to law enforcement partners on Jan. 13, the FBI warned that conspiracy-minded followers of QAnon may feel emboldened after the perceived "success" of the Capitol assault.</p> <p>"Some [domestic violent extremists] view the 6 January event as a success, in conjunction with the potential to exploit follow-on lawful gatherings and ideological drivers -- including conspiracy theories, such as QAnon -- likely will also inspire some [domestic violent extremists] and others to engage in more sporadic, lone actor or small cell violence," the bulletin warned.</p> <p>Ahead of the inauguration, law enforcement officials are keeping a close watch on the threat posed by QAnon-aligned "lone wolves." The Washington Post reported Monday that the FBI privately warned its partner agencies that QAnon adherents have discussed returning to Washington for Joe Biden's swearing-in, posing as National Guard troops.</p>
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